

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND THE SEARCH FOR STRONG  
DEMOCRACY: A PEDAGOGICAL PARADOX OF GETTING TO  
COMMITMENT

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# COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND THE SEARCH FOR STRONG DEMOCRACY: A PEDAGOGICAL PARADOX OF GETTING TO COMMITMENT

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Much research has focused on the current crisis in democracy, characterized by plummeting electoral participation figures, distrust of politicians, and apathy regarding other forms of political participation. According to many scholars, such as Barber (1984), Osterman (2002), and West (2004), the solution to this crisis entails getting people engaged in public life, starting at the local level, through participation in organizations of civil society. One such organization is the IAF, which educates people to engage effectively in civic life. In this study the pedagogical approach used by one of the IAF member organizations was closely observed through an ethnographic case study approach. It was revealed that the organization's storytelling and relational organizing pedagogy effectively engaged people in a cathartic emotional learning process, which had a powerful emancipatory effect on organizational leaders. However, other institutional and pedagogical practices tended to silence leaders instead of promoting democratic participation. This paradox was interpreted considering learning in social action theories, transformative learning and theories of democracy.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born and raised in Arequipa, Peru, Robert Ojeda first came to live in the United States at the age of 18 years to pursue his college education, eventually obtaining a master's degree in international agriculture and rural development from Cornell University. He has served in several positions which have provided invaluable context and experience for his dissertation research: volunteer in the Peace Corps in Honduras, Civics and Citizenship Program Manager/Instructor for Pima Community College Adult Education and Program Manager-English Language Acquisition for Adults Program for the Literacy Volunteers of Tucson.

Robert is currently the Director of the Community Food Resource Center at the Community Food Bank of Southern Arizona, where he oversees programs dealing with education and advocacy around food security issues for Pima County and the region. Robert has also taught community organizing workshops, and more recently, a Leadership and Civic Participation for Social Change course at the University of Arizona. The participants in these workshops were primarily non-profit, university, and union leaders from all over Latin America. He has also trained public health undergraduate students, as well as community leaders involved in food security, food sovereignty, and public health work.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AND THE SEARCH FOR STRONG DEMOCRACY

The idea for this research project had been brewing in my mind for several years before I came to Cornell. I had been an active Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC) leader for about seven years before pursuing my graduate studies. My work as a PCIC leader had had a powerful impact on me, thus my interest in learning more about the pedagogical practices used by leaders and organizers. I briefly explore my participation as a PCIC leader in what follows.

One of the most powerful experiences I have had as an adult learner took place through my participation as a leader with PCIC between 1993 and 1999. My work with PCIC changed my life forever; it gave me a sense of confidence, an appetite to participate politically in public life. Before I moved to Tucson from my native Peru, I had never been involved in any type of grassroots or community organizing work. In search for a better future, I moved to the United States in 1989, attended college and graduated in 1993. That same year, I moved to Tucson, Arizona, where I began teaching English as a Second Language to immigrants from all over the world at Pima County Adult Education (PCAE). As time went by, my students began sharing their life stories with me. I kept hearing stories of people not being able to find a decent paying job, of being exploited at their workplace or by their landlord, and often discriminated against. Many of them worked minimum wage jobs, had to work two or three jobs, and had no time to spend with their families. All of these conversations pained me and made me feel impotent, because I had no idea what to do about it. I

came to realize, I did not know my community and much less how things got done. I felt powerless.

Two years later, my stepfather, who at the time was also working as a teacher for PCAE, invited me to attend a community meeting organized by the PCIC. Because of my loyalty to my stepfather, I decided to go. The meeting took place in the Southside of Tucson, the poorest area of the city. When I arrived, my stepfather was sitting with about 500 adult education students and some teachers. There were about 2000 people present at the meeting that day. The group was made up of Hispanics, blacks, whites, and poor and middle class families. They came from schools, from churches, from unions, and from community organizations. Some spoke English, some were bilingual, and others spoke Spanish only. My first reaction was one of surprise; this was a huge meeting, much larger than what I had imagined.

The meeting began with the co-chairs of the event framing the agenda for the meeting. It was amazing to see how in control they seemed. A leader from each institution present introduced herself/himself and named the institution they belonged to, and how many families belonged to their respective organizations. That day there must have been representatives from thirty to forty PCIC-member organizations. The large hall was filled with energy, people spoke in a loud and commanding and dramatic voice; there was emotion and passion, and excitement in the air. Once all introductions had taken place, one of the leaders asked the crowd in a commanding voice, "How are we feeling today?" The crowd responded in unison, "good." Then the same leader asked, "Are we ready to fight for our families and for justice in our community?" The crowd responded with a loud yes and clapped.

During the meeting another leader said, “We are here to protect and fight for Tucson families so they can have a decent and just life. We have been conducting research actions to find out what problems Tucson families face. Based on hundreds of conversations with people, we have been able to put together a family agenda, and we want the city and county to support it.” The agenda items for that night included funding for educational programs for adults and children, after school programs for youth and children, affordable housing, living wages, healthcare, and immigrants’ rights among others. I remember thinking, “Here is an organization that is fighting for the same issues my students are struggling with.”

Just before a group of city and county elected officials entered the meeting hall, the co-chairs of the event (two experienced PCIC leaders) reminded the crowd that PCIC conducted public business in a respectful manner and that we should restrain ourselves from booing politicians if they refused to support PCIC’s agenda. People were also told that this had been a carefully planned event, and people should only speak if they were part of the official agenda.

About an hour into the meeting, the elected officials were invited to come into the hall escorted by PCIC leaders; they were invited to join the main stage and sit next to PCIC’s leaders. One of the co-chairs stood up and explained to the elected officials what the meeting would be about, and thanked them for coming. Then, four leaders stood up, took the stage and facing the crowd shared their personal stories. I remember one of them, Karen, a Native American woman, talked about how difficult things had been for her and her 5 children. She said, “I had no support for my children before I learned of PCIC. I used to live on welfare, begging for food all the time. Now I have a

job that allows me to take better care of my children, which includes healthcare for them. I am not a victim anymore.” All of the stories spoke about the difficulties these people faced because of low wages, lack of support for children’s programs, lack of educational opportunities for them and their children, and the importance PCIC had had in changing their lives. I remember feeling the storytellers’ pain as I listened to their stories. I felt empathy and a special connection to the storytellers. Although I had heard very similar stories from my students, this time it was different. I did not feel frustrated or impotent. I felt energized and hopeful.

Once the elected officials had heard the stories, one of the co-chairs stood up and said looking at the politicians, “You have heard these stories, stories that represent what is happening to our families in Tucson. These are stories of people with no jobs, with low paying jobs, of people in need for training and education in order to better their lives. We have been in conversation with hundreds of families in Tucson and have heard their stories. We come to you with an agenda based on those stories, the real stories of what is happening to people in Tucson. Are you going to support our agenda?” The co-chair asked each politician to stand up and take three minutes only to respond. I remember one of the politicians who had decided to ramble on, was quickly interrupted by a leader, and asked to please respond to the question with a yes or a no answer. The politician was forced to respond to the question, and then sat down. This was certainly not business as usual, and that was very intriguing to me. The politicians were not running the show, the PCIC leaders were. Once all politicians had a chance to speak, the co-chairs thanked them for coming, thanked the crowd for coming, and ended the meeting with a closing prayer.

I left the meeting energized but with many questions, questions I intend to address in this research project. I was intrigued by how extremely organized everything had been during the meeting, almost militaristically. I wondered how all of these leaders had managed to be so connected, energetic, and how much work they must have put into it. How did they manage to bring 2000 people to the event? I also wondered how and where they had learned to confront public officials the way they did. How had they learned to speak in public like they did? How was PCIC able to get all these powerful elected officials to come to a meeting, particularly when they knew people would challenge them? What kind of power did this organization have? How did people learn how to tell such powerful and compelling stories? What was my own story? Did I even have a compelling story? Something really powerful happened that night, and I felt compelled to find out what it was about PCIC that was having such an alluring effect on me. Ultimately, I wanted to understand the dynamics of learning inside PCIC to see if I could come up with insights that could enhance people's participation in democracy. In short, this study explores and documents the extent to which learning and education enhance political learning and citizenship for Strong Democracy.

### **The Problem**

One of the current debates among educators, politicians, scholars, and political parties revolves around a perceived crisis in our current democratic system. For some, the crisis we face emerged because of what Barber (1984) calls "too little democracy" (p. xi). Proponents of this line of argument suggest that this crisis has been caused by a liberal democratic doctrine. Alienation is seen as the central indicator of the modern

political crisis (Barber, 1984, 1998; Bellah, 1985; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Osterman, 2002; Peterson, 2011; Putnam, 2000; Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) and is often measured by plummeting electoral participation figures, distrust of politicians, and apathy regarding other forms of political participation (Barber, 1984; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Osterman, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Schugurensky, 2001; Warren, 2001).

Proponents of a way out of this crisis suggest that a key to engaging people in public life is to bring what Osterman (2002) calls “progressive politics” back. Barber (1984) proposes a similar solution when he suggests the need for “Strong Democracy.” West (2004) refers to it as “deep democracy.” Others, such as Schugurensky (2001), see “participatory democracy” as an alternative to the current trend. The common argument among supporters of a more participatory, just, and engaging democratic practice is that changes have to happen at the local level, within organizations of civil society. Osterman, for example, suggests that looking at local community organizing efforts can provide the answers to reengaging citizens in social action and bringing Strong Democracy back. To these scholars, local experiences are schools for effective citizenship and civic learning. As Sandel (1982) explains, “If local government and municipal institutions are no longer adequate arenas for republic citizenship, we must seek such public spaces as may be found amidst the institutions of civil society- in schools and work places, churches and synagogues, trade unions, and social movements” (p. 348).

The key to reengaging citizens in social action lies in building institutions of different kinds that get people together to learn about and become interested in civic life. In this regard, Osterman states that “strong local organizations, political and



otherwise, are necessary to teach skills, to educate people about political issues, and to mobilize people” (2002, p. 18). Developing political capacities for engaging in civic life is learned through social action (Barber, 1984; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Foley, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Peterson, 2011; Putnam, 2000; Schugurensky, 2002; Warren, 2001). This learning process ultimately leads to individual as well as social transformation (Barber, 1984; Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2001). The shift from being passive citizens to having a sense of individual and collective agency is linked to transformative learning processes. Thus, an essential dimension of civic learning is tied to its transformative nature (Barber, 1984; Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2001). Furthermore, as Schugurensky (2001) argues, there is a reciprocal relationship between transformative learning and strong democratic practices.

In the U.S., the field of adult education has been dominated by learning theory based on individual development in formal educational settings (Foley, 1999; Schugurensky, 2001, 2003). Because of this phenomenon, transformative learning through social action has been undervalued and understudied (Foley, 1999; Schugurensky, 2001, 2003). Even though transformational learning is a key component in reengaging citizens in public life, we know little about the nature of the transformation process inside organizations that practice Strong Democracy (Foley, 1999; Livingstone, 1999; Schugurensky, 2001, 2003). Although detailed descriptions of social struggles exist (e.g., Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998), the learning dimension has been overlooked and often not recognized as learning (Foley, 1999; Hart, 2010; Schugurensky, 2001, 2003). In light of these findings, I start with the premise that learning and education in social action play an

essential role in revitalizing democracy. It is therefore crucial that we study these processes in depth; indeed, adult educators must turn their attention to this type of learning. The Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) is an ideal organization for observing these learning processes.

The Industrial Areas Foundation is a network of community organizing organizations that has a clear training system for engaging citizens in social action. The IAF explicitly values leadership development as a core component of its organizing strategy. It has effectively developed community leaders and strengthened local organizations for decades. In his studies of IAF organizations in Texas, Osterman (2002) concluded that the teaching in the IAF happens at multiple levels. The IAF changes people's conceptions of themselves, imparts basic techniques of electoral politics, and teaches confrontation tactics. Also, leaders learn how to research issues and how to negotiate and compromise. There are good descriptions and analyses of the IAF's organizing practices (see Chambers, 2003; Gecan, 2002; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998) and training system. However, so far no one has undertaken an in-depth analysis of the learning processes within the IAF, particularly one that goes beyond a learning theory based on individual development.

To sum up, I contend that in order to engage people as active citizens in social action more effectively, thus, bringing strong democratic practices back, we need to understand the learning that takes place within community organizations like the IAF. Because learning and education in social action (community organizing) are fundamental to revitalizing democracy, the purpose of this study is to explore and

document the extent to which learning and education enhance political learning and citizenship for Strong Democracy. This entails observing how people experience learning inside the IAF. I investigate the extent to which organizations such as the IAF contribute to the development of Strong Democracy. I also explore what their pedagogical practices are and the learning that takes place inside IAF type organizations.

I began by looking at the relationship between democracy, the Industrial Areas Foundation, learning in social action, and transformative learning. This is the first step in developing a theoretical framework for investigating learning for civic participation and action in IAF type organizations. Next, I discuss the current state of democracy in the United States and provide an alternative democratic model.

### **The Crisis of Liberal Democracy**

In recent times, the haves have been outdistancing the have-nots at an astonishing pace. Piketty and Saez (2006) found that in 2005 the top 300,000 Americans collectively received more income than the bottom 150 million. Likewise, Wolff (2010) calculated that in 2004 the top 1 percent of US-wealth holding households had 34.3 percent of all the wealth in the country, while the bottom 40 percent had 0.2 percent of the total. The top 1 percent held an average of 14,786,000 in net worth, while the bottom 40 percent averaged 2,200 dollars. Some argue that this disparity means the wealthiest Americans have enormous material resources available for political influence (Hacker & Pierson, 2010). Evidence of this disparity is illustrated by the 2008-2009 bailout of financial institutions, in which hundreds of billions of dollars went mostly to bankers and bond-holders with little help for home

owners or accountability to taxpayers (Hacker & Pierson, 2009). For instance, two billion dollars were spent in the 2000 elections and four billion in the 2004 US elections. There is mounting evidence that nothing happens in American politics without backing from the wealthiest Americans (Hacker & Pierson, 2010; Ferguson & Johnson, 2009; Dornhoff, 2006). Furthermore, there is empirical evidence showing that financial resources from the wealthiest Americans affect electoral outcomes (Jacobson, 2012). Jacobson further notes the sad reality that electoral campaigns are no longer controlled by the candidates and their organizations, but rather by national parties and powerful interests groups.

At the same time, according to the Pew Research Center, more than half of all American workers today have experienced periods of unemployment, taken a cut in pay or hours, or been forced to go part-time (Pew Research Center Social and Demographic Trends Report, 2010). The average unemployed worker has been jobless for nearly six months. Collapsing share and house prices have destroyed a fifth of the wealth of the average household. Nearly six in ten Americans have cancelled or cut back on holidays. About a fifth of them say that their mortgages are underwater. One in four of those between 18 and 29 have moved back in with their parents. Fewer than half of all adults expect their children to have a higher standard of living than theirs, and more than a quarter say it will be lower. These marked socio-economic inequalities have led to the decline in public trust and limited civic engagement (Barber, 1996; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Osterman, 2002; Peterson, 2011; West, 2004). This civic alienation, in turn, aggravates other dangerous trends: social and cultural divisions, growing economic disparity, and a wide pattern of group demands for rights

and resources with little reciprocal commitment to responsibilities and contribution (Boyte, 1996). Likewise, there has been a re-voicing of individual constitutional protections as freedoms and rights without concomitant responsibilities. Clearly, the lack of civic engagement and of trust in government has been compounded by the economic inequalities that we see in the United States today.

At the same time, scholars still trust that party realignment will solve the crisis in participation, when in fact there is evidence that the party system as we know is not functioning (Barber, 1984). The main characteristic of this participation breakdown is that fewer Americans take part in public life, and increasingly public affairs are being relegated to the private sector (Barber, 1984; West, 2004). The result is an extraordinary influence of highly moneyed and specialized interests in dictating congressional action. For many, the privatization of public life has deep roots in liberal democratic thinking (see Barber, 1984, 1998; Bellah, 1985; Coles, 2006; Dryzek 2002; Fryer, 2010; Osterman, 2002; Peterson, 2011; Sandel, 1982; Schugurensky, 2002, 2003; West, 2004). In essence, the intellectual pillars of liberal democracy rest on an idea of human nature where everyone is out to maximize their own interests without regard to anyone else's well-being (Osterman, 2002; Coles, 2006; West, 2004).

According to Held (1996), [the models of democracy could reasonably be divided into two broad types: direct or participatory democracy (a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved) and liberal or representative democracy (system of rule embracing elected -officers- who undertake to "represent" the interests and/or views of citizens within the framework of "the rule of the law")] (p. 6). In what follows I present a more in-depth description and analysis

of these two models in order to develop a far more reaching model of democracy, one that builds on the ideas from the participatory democratic model, while accounting for the complexity and messiness of the real world and also challenging power inequalities.

### **Liberal Democracy**

Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, liberal ideas have formed alliances with rationalism, empiricism, enlightenment, laissez-faire economics, and nationalism, but none has been as useful as the alliance with democracy (Barber, 1998). Liberalism was originally a fight for emancipation from political and religious absolutism but has now disengaged from those original efforts. Liberal democracy today, as Barber, Bellah, and others suggest, is concerned with individual liberty at the expense of securing public justice: “to advance interests rather than to discover goods, and to keep men safely apart rather than to bring them fruitfully together” (Barber, 1998, p. 4).

According to Habermas (1996), under liberal democracy the citizen’s status is determined primarily according to negative rights she or he has vis-à-vis the state and other citizens. As bearers of these rights citizens benefit from the protection of the government, as long as they follow their private interests within the limits set by legal statutes- and these provide protection against government involvement.

Liberal democrats see political will being formed by the aggregation of individual interests tied to the market. As Habermas (1996) explains, in the liberal perspective, will-formation is determined by the competition of strategically acting groups attempting to maintain or gain positions of power. As Benhabib suggests, political will has the purpose of “building together and pushing private interests

against a government apparatus specializing in the administrative employment of political power for collective goals” (1996, p. 21). Through bargaining, rational choice, and the market, the needs of individual citizens will be served.

A successful liberal democratic process is measured by the citizens’ consent, as determined by the votes of persons. Election results give government the power, and at the same time, the government must justify the use of power to the people. A contest of power exemplified according to the liberal model of market competition is determined by the rational choices of the voters (Barber, 1984). The assumption is that people’s choices at the polls give expression to their preferences. Voting decisions have the same structure as the acts of choice made by participants in a market. One would argue that under the liberal view, democratic will-formation has the exclusive function of legitimating the exercise of political power. More importantly, this model is able to resist attacks on the individual - his or her privacy, property, interests, and rights - but is much less capable to resist assaults citizen participation, community, or justice (Barber, 1984).

### **Critique of Liberal Democracy**

Osterman (2002), Barber (1984), and Sandel (1982) among others have attacked the liberal vision of politics grounded in ideal, isolated, autonomous citizens who enjoy a set of legally protected rights but whose politics are not rooted in real participation in self-government. Barber (1984) calls this model “thin democracy,” while Sandel (1982) calls it “procedural republic.” The intellectual pillars of thin democracy rest on an idea of human nature where everyone is out to maximize their own interests without regard to anyone else’s well-being. Liberal democracy does not

see civil society as a source of values, norms, and constraints on “jungle like” behavior (Osterman, 2002). As Barber states, “thin democracy, yields neither the pleasures of participation nor the fellowship of civic association, neither the autonomy of self-governance of continuous political activity nor the enlarging mutuality of... deliberation, decision and work” (1984, p. 24).

Liberal democracy is based on assumptions about human nature, knowledge, and politics that are truly liberal but that are not inherently democratic. Its conception of the individual and of individual interest “undermines the democratic practices upon which individuals and their interests depend” (Barber, 1994, p. 4). Liberal democracy is thus a thin theory of democracy because democratic values are an optional and conditional means to achieve individualistic and private ends (Barber, 1994).

Liberal democracy creates the danger of private interests manipulating the political system: “Without agency we are left with a ‘thin democracy’, a system from which the best that can be expected is that people elect the elites who do the real work of politics in government” (Osterman, 2002, p. 172). When this happens, as is the case today, politics becomes disconnected from people’s everyday problems and concerns, particularly because spaces for them to do so have been co-opted by the powerful voices of market interests (West, 2004). These forces have increasingly used their political power to sideline people’s input. As a result, a lack of trust in public political spaces and politicians has generated alienation and lack of civic engagement by citizens. Consequently, the idea of the “common good” seems more and more difficult to achieve. Because liberal democracy “gives up on the idea of community, and because it gives very short shrift to the importance of a common enterprise, this ‘thin’



view of democracy leads to a situation in which people are no longer engaged in politics” (Osterman, 2002, p. 181). By acting beyond the traditional sites of democratic control, as Barber (1984, 1998) suggests, democracy can be strengthened from within. In the next sections I explore perspectives that challenge liberal democracy and provide useful insights regarding ways of reengaging people in politics.

### **Strong Democracy**

The main assumption that underlies Barber’s theory of strong democratic practice, or what Sandel (1982) calls “republican freedom,” is that free citizens can only flourish politically in a community where civic traditions are strong and civic duty is widely respected (Barber, 1984; Coles, 2006; West, 2004). For proponents of these ideas, liberalism does not serve democracy and the continued existence of democracy depends on discovering institutional forms that untie its connection with liberal theory. These scholars see strong democracy as the only viable form modern democratic politics can take. Most importantly, they see participation (not defined as voting) as essential to the survival of democracy.

As defined by Barber (1984), strong participatory democracy resolves conflict through a process of ongoing self-legislation and the formation of a political community capable of transforming dependent private persons into free citizens and partial and private interests into public goods. Strong Democracy rests on the idea of a self-governing community of citizens who are united less by uniform interests than by civic education, who can reach a common purpose and who share action by merit of

their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than by their unselfishness or their kindness (Barber, 1984).

As Barber (1984) states, a core component of Strong Democracy is strong democratic talk: it involves listening as well as speaking, feeling as well as thinking, and acting as well as reflecting. Politics is not about finding truth but rather about recognizing one another. It is about creating knowledge together. Political knowledge is about creating something through action and interaction. Strong Democracy is about talk and creative action, talk and speech, and talk and listening. Under this model, conversation “aims at creating a sense of commonality not unity, and the mutualism it aspires to weaves into one carpet the threads of a hundred viewpoints” (1984, p. 185). This idea is very important because it speaks to the importance of individual perspectives within a larger community.

Participatory politics conceptualized by Barber, Coles, Schugurensky, West and others, deals with public disputes and conflicts of interest by subjecting them to an endless process of deliberation, decision, and action. Barber’s argument resembles Danish scholar Bent Flyvbjerg’s depiction of democracy (cited in *Rationality and Power*, 1998): as a form of governing that is fought for, day in and day out, to make it work rather than a final point that is obtained once and retained forever. Community grows out of participation and at the same time makes participation possible; civic activity educates individuals on how to think publicly as citizens even as citizenship informs civic activity with the required sense of publicness and justice. Freedom is what comes out of this process, not what goes into it. As Barber (1984) states, “strong democracy is the politics of amateurs, where every man is compelled to encounter

every other man without the intermediary of expertise” (p. 152). It “tries to revitalize citizenship without neglecting the problems of efficient government by defining democracy as a form of government in which all of the people govern themselves in at least some public matters at least some of the time” (Barber, 1984, p. xiv). According to proponents of strong participatory democratic practices, the ultimate effect that Strong Democracy has is that it challenges the politics of elites and masses that masquerades as democracy in the West and in doing so offers an alternative to thin democracy (Barber, 1984). This idea can be seen as somewhat utopian and based on rationalistic assumptions. Strong democratic practices do not address the inherent inequality of dialogic communication, which are based on power and irreconcilable differences among participants. I further discuss these issues in the next section.

### **A Critique of Strong Democracy**

Strong participatory democracy aims to develop a sense of commonality rather than unity, and in doing so values the individual and the communal or social. Nevertheless, the strong democratic approach still troubles some because its perceived emphasis on community and civic duty may displace the fundamental rights of individuals (Benhabib, 1996; Fryer, 2010; Young, 1996). This could be interpreted as the disempowerment of the individual for the benefit of the “common good.” Just as liberal democracy may abuse power in favor of individual economic interests, a strong democratic approach may use the power of the collective to silence individual voices. Barber (1984) would argue that Strong Democracy does respect and value individuality. By valuing democratic talk and deliberative practices, this model places individual perceptions and points of view at the center of this model. These

deliberative processes produce collective knowledge, but at the same time recognize diverse perspectives and ways of thinking in public life (Boyte, 1996).

In addition, more radical proponents of social change (Dryzek, 2002; Freire, 1970, 1973; Healy, 2011; Young, 1996) may find the Strong Democracy perspective even more dangerous than the liberal one. Their argument would be that democratic talk and participatory processes run the danger of simply becoming tools that create the illusion of freedom and justice, but in fact may be contributing to maintaining the status quo (liberal economics and liberal democratic politics and practices). What is needed is a model that accounts for the messiness and complexity of the real world and is explicit about challenging power inequalities. In the following section, I bring our attention to Iris Young's communicative democracy model.

### **Communicative Democracy**

Iris Young (1996, 2000) finds two main problems with participatory democracy, which is based on deliberative practices. Deliberative democracy entails creating a community and citizens gathering to talk about collective goals, ideals, and actions. This process is focused on discussing the common good rather than competing for the promotion of private good for each individual (liberal democracy). This democratic process limits democratic discussion to argument with a cultural bias that excludes people from the process (Dryzek, 2002; Fryer, 2010; Healy, 2011; Young, 1996, 2000). "The assumption that unity is either a starting point or goal of democratic discussion, moreover, may also have exclusionary consequences" (Young, 1996, p. 122).

For Young, the deliberative model presumes that by doing away with the influence of political or economic power, people's ways of talking and knowing will be equal. Young contends that real equality can happen when cultural differences and diverse social positions are also removed. Deliberative democracy assumes a neutral and universal culture (Young, 1996, 2000), and in doing so, it ignores the fact that "norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as forms of power that silence or devalue the speech of some people" (Young, 1996, p. 123). Deliberation can then be characterized as competition based on the best argument, which has traditionally been dominated by a white male culture (Healy, 2011; Young, 1996, 2000). Confrontation and assertiveness are valued as well as formal speech styles. For Young, deliberation privileges speech that is dispassionate and disembodied, devoid of emotions (anger, hurt), as well as bodily expressions of emotion. This speech culture of white middle-class men is likely to be contained and unemotional. By contrast, the speech culture of women and minorities has a tendency to be lively, excited, emotional, and metaphorical (Healy, 2011; Young, 1996, 2000).

Young proposes the communicative democracy approach as a modification to the traditional deliberative approach. Communicative democracy pays attention to "social difference, to the way power sometimes enters speech itself, recognizes the cultural specificity of deliberative practices, and proposes a more inclusive model of communication" (Young, 1996, p. 123). To do so, Young (1996, 2000) proposes that persons pay attention to their differences in class, gender, race, and religion. Three conditions are essential for communicative democracy to take place: considerable interdependence, equal respect, and agreed-on procedures. In fact, Young (1996)

asserts that no more unity than this is required in the communicative-democracy approach. In saying this, Young (1996) recognizes the necessity of some unity as a condition for democratic communication, but this unity involves thinner conditions than those of deliberative democracy.

Young (1996) also suggests that communicative democracy, in addition to critical argument (deliberation), requires greeting (gestures of flattery, deference, and conciliatory caring), rhetoric (the structure, modes, and norms of communication), and storytelling. For Young, storytelling promotes understanding across difference without creating homogeneity in three ways. 1) Storytelling uncovers the unique experiences of those in diverse social locations, experiences that cannot be shared by those situated differently, but which they have to understand in order to do justice to the others. 2) Storytelling reveals a source of values, culture and meaning, which surfaces from people's situated history. 3) The blend of narrative from diverse perspectives produces collective knowledge. Because each person can tell their story with the same authority, their stories have equal importance in the communicative situation (Young, 1996, 2000). Finally, Young's perspective acknowledges that when political dialogue aspires to work out collective problems it needs a "plurality of perspectives, speaking styles, and ways of expressing the particularity of social situations as well as the general applicability of principles" (1996, p. 132).

### **A Theoretical Framework for Democracy**

I have argued in this chapter that we are currently facing a crisis of democracy. Liberal democracy has had a deleterious effect on citizen participation in civic life. Its individualistic emphasis has isolated autonomous citizens. As argued previously, this

model is based on premises that are liberal but not democratic. I have also argued that a hybrid model of Barber's strong participatory democracy, one that accounts for issues of power and difference based on Young's communicative model, is key to reengaging citizens in public life and reversing the current trends in democracy. The following are the main theoretical tenets of this hybrid model:

1. As Barber suggests, political participation will thrive in communities where civic traditions are strong and civic duty is respected. Political participation entails strong democratic talk (listening, speaking, feeling, thinking, acting and reflecting, and recognizing each other). This process leads to the collective creation of knowledge, and the development of a sense of commonality, and more importantly, a sense of community. Here, Young's (1996) communicative democracy perspective is essential. Considering that political dialogue aspires to work out collective problems, it requires a variety of views and styles of speaking.
2. Community grows out of the process of political participation, and in turn, community enhances participation. There is a recursive relationship between participation and community formation through social action (Barber, 1984).
3. Norms of deliberation are culturally specific and often operate as a form of power that silences or devalues the speech of some people. In this respect, careful attention must be paid to differences in class, gender, race, and religion. Interdependence, equal respect, and agreed-on procedures are essential for democracy to take place.
4. Democracy requires deliberation (critical argument), greeting (gestures of flattery, deference, and conciliatory caring), rhetoric (a structure and modes of communication/norm formation), and storytelling.

5. Storytelling is an essential aspect of engaging citizens in social action, because it allows for a more egalitarian democratic participation. Since each person's story is unique, all stories have equal importance in the communicative situation (Young, 1996).

6. A hybrid model of democracy should aspire to achieve social justice. This implies the need to critically evaluate social, political, and economic structures for the purpose of developing collective strategies to confront injustice and address the root causes of this injustice. It also requires a critical evaluation of how power differentials enhance or limit people's participation within these unjust socio-economic and political structures.

I have argued in this chapter that Strong Democracy involves developing the capacity of citizens to engage actively in civic life. Strong democratic practices educate individuals on how to think publicly as citizens. This process liberates people and builds community. It ultimately leads to individual as well as social transformation. The Industrial Areas Foundation is an ideal organization for studying these processes. I explore them further in the next chapter by looking at the Industrial Areas Foundation's organizing tradition.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE INDUSTRIAL AREAS FOUNDATION COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TRADITION AND ITS' POTENTIAL FOR STRONG DEMOCRACY

I have argued previously that there exists a crisis in our current democratic system. I have also suggested that a response to this crisis could be a Strong Democratic response. The IAF is an organization that provides a lens for observing whether or not Strong Democracy is possible within civil society organizations. Since the training of leaders is central to the IAF's organizing model, we will get a sense of internal strong democratic practices, and how the IAF organizes certain kinds of learning by looking at the pedagogical practices within the IAF. In this chapter, I look at the history of community organizing in the United States; I situate the IAF within the Radical Democratic Organizing Tradition, I explore the learning dimension of IAF organizing, and I consider some debates within this organizing tradition.

#### **The Community Organizing Tradition in the United States**

According to Fisher (1994), community organizing in the United States has had three major influences. He classifies these as the social work, the neighborhood maintenance, and the political activist approaches. Fisher clarifies that although these approaches have distinct characteristics, contemporary organizing models often use more than one approach at a time.

## **The Social Work Tradition**

The social work approach, which began in the late 1800s, defines community as a social organism with needs that must be coordinated and met for the neighborhood to survive and remain viable (Fisher, 1994). The group that is to be organized includes the working and lower classes. Under this approach, the organizer is a professional social worker whose main role is that of an enabler, an advocate, a coordinator, and a planner. The organizer seeks consensus, pursues gradualist tactics, works with the existing power structure, and promotes social reform. The social worker gathers together existing social services and delivers and lobbies for needed social resources. The approach used to get these services is mainly consensual. Its goal is to encourage group formation in order to achieve social integration, to deliver services. Examples of this organizing tradition include the Social Settlement Movement, the Community Center Movement, the Cincinnati Social Unit Plan, community chests, United Way, and Community Action. This approach assumes that there are common interests among the dominant groups in society and the community. It trusts that some of the powerful will empathize with the poor and seek to meet their needs (Fisher, 1994). Critics of this approach have characterized it as charity work and social engineering. It can be considered to be elitist, manipulative, and as maintaining the status quo. At its best, this approach is effective at delivering social services (Fisher, 1994; Hess, 1999).

### **The Neighborhood Maintenance Approach**

The neighborhood maintenance approach views the neighborhood as an area that has inherent commercial value. The perceived community problems are threats to property values, neighborhood homogeneity, or lack of sufficient services. The organizer works with the upper and middle classes, and his/her role is that of an elected spokesperson, civic leader or interest-group broker. The role of the area residents is simply to pay dues. The strategies used in this approach involve seeking consensus, applying peer pressure, political lobbying, and engaging in legal action if necessary. The goal of this approach to community organizing is to improve property values, maintain the neighborhood, and deliver services to its members. Examples of this approach include neighborhood preservation associations, neighborhood civic clubs, and property owners associations (Fisher, 1994; Hess, 1999). Like the social work approach, this organizing model is driven by the organizer's agenda, and by expert knowledge (Fisher, 1994).

### **The Political Activist Approach**

The political activist approach sees communities as lacking the power to defend themselves in such a way so that people have control over their lives. Under this approach powerlessness, exploitation, and community destruction are the main problems to be tackled. The organizer functions as a political activist, a mobilizer, and an educator. The development of indigenous leadership and mass support is a key component of this organizing tradition. Ultimately this organizing tradition focuses on obtaining, maintaining or restructuring power, and developing on alternative

institutions. Organizing tactics under this approach range from consensual to confrontational (Fisher, 1994).

An essential tenet of the political activist approach is that the process of challenging existing socio-economic and political power structures raises political consciousness, and dramatic political consciousness changes take place among the poor (Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2006; Fisher, 1994; Osterman, 2002; Rooney, 1995; Sandy & Schutts, 2011; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998). Examples of this tradition include tenant organizations, Saul Alinsky programs, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a Democratic Society, and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), among others (Fisher, 1994). As Fisher rightly states, the political activist efforts that take up progressive goals and challenge existing power structures, “are true training grounds for democracy and its potential for change” (1994, p. 212). The Industrial Areas Foundation falls under this community organizing tradition, which (Coles, 2006) refers to as the radical democratic organizing tradition. Within the radical democratic tradition, there is a difference of opinion regarding what this organizing approach should look like. I discuss these tensions next.

### **The Radical Democratic Community Organizing Tradition**

According to Coles (2006), radical democratic organizing reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s. As Fisher (1994) argues, the 1960s “will be remembered as a decade of mass insurgence, radical politics, and youthful experimentation as a time when the notion of democracy was reinvigorated with participatory content” (p. 104).

The radical ferment of the sixties and seventies grew out of the civil rights movement (Fisher, 1994). As the organizing revolution of the sixties and seventies ended and the conservative eighties began, scholars and activists began to reflect upon the causes of decline and possibilities for renewal of radical democratic organizing (Coles, 2006). A key challenge back then had to do with finding ways to organize broad and intense democratic movements that might change “the widespread cultural patterns of deferential quiescence and grossly unjust distributions of goods and productive capacities” (p. 548). Some like Piven and Cloward (1979) argued, instead of attempting to create mass-based organizations in the midst of political commotion generated by people taking to the streets, it was more astute to intensify the political defiance that encourages de-legitimation crises. Ira Katznelson (1981) suggested that community organizing ought to find a balance between meeting people where they are and presenting more radical cultural and social analyses and networks of organizing, aimed at challenging the existing order.

In the 1970s, IAF organizers, seeing the state of radical democratic organizing in decline, were convinced that favorable attempts to democratize culture and power depended on going back to the institutions of civil society that were left intact, and organizing within each locality and organization able to connect with and nurture the more radically democratic and pluralistic traditions of communities, congregations, and families (Coles, 2006). The IAF looked to be radically countercultural, but in a way that avoided ideological posturing and connected to the particularities of “people’s everyday lives, faiths, issues, angers, and hopes” (Coles, 2006, p. 549). The IAF aimed at developing grassroots relationships and power in order to rebuild a broad

and deep network across differences that divide people and often contribute to their lack of participation (Coles, 2006). The IAF's goal was to hold dominant institutions accountable and responsible to an authentically democratically constituted community (Coles, 2006).

In response to the IAF's new organizing approach, Katznelson (1981), argued that "the IAF's diminished focus on work, class, and scales of contestation sufficient to alter prerogatives of capital were major shortcomings" (In Coles 2006, p. 549). Because of Katznelson and others' critiques of IAF type organizations, a new populism in the field of organizing emerged. A group of activists and scholars critically engaged in the new populism suggested that a class analysis and systematic critique (including people's critique of traditional frames) should be a central aspect of organizing, as well as a focus on ways to move beyond local organizing to address large corporate and state power. These "transformative populists" sought to develop a politics that operated in the tension between "meeting people where they are in the communities and traditions, and the introduction of more radical analyses and networks of organizing aimed at contesting larger modes of power" (Coles, 2006, p. 549).

Coles (2006) argues that the success of transformative populists has been marginal in recent decades. By contrast, Coles sees the IAF as one of the most impressive efforts when it comes to organizing lasting grassroots democratic practices across a broad cross-section of people effecting redistributions of power in cities all over the United States. Coles (2006) suggests that progressive efforts to cultivate a

politics of disruption have had limited success. The numerous attempts to develop large, powerful, and enduring progressive organizations have had little success forming deep and enduring connections with broad sectors of the public (Coles, 2006). Meanwhile, the IAF and organizations like it have been incredibly “successful at broadening and sustaining broad-based networks of democratic power, cultural change, and significant redistribution at the local level (living wages, housing, infrastructure, schools)” (Coles, 2006, p. 549). He further contends that IAF-like organizations have done particularly well in a period of increasing right-wing dominance. Still, considering the point of view of those who critique the IAF, Coles wonders whether the IAF is really about what he calls a “politics of containment,” one that reproduces the dominant socio-economic and political structures in society, or whether their work is grounded on a strong ideology critique component, one that challenges the dominant culture. Coles suggests the latter option to be the case with the IAF. In this sense, he argues, many groups like IAF have sought to increase the scales of political contestation; many address critiques of capitalism and class (Coles, 2006). Coles (2006) argues there is potential for Strong Democracy to take place inside organizations like the IAF. In order to better understand this possibility, I explore the IAF’s organizing model further.

### **The IAF’s Community Organizing Model**

Although there are increasingly more studies and books written on the IAF, and even though these studies differ somewhat in their focus and scope of analysis, for the most part they provide very similar descriptions of the IAF’s organizing model.

Furthermore, very few of these studies focus on the learning dimension of the IAF's organizing model. Most scholars of the IAF consider that the IAF model holds promise for a new kind of democracy, one that comes very close to the strong democratic ideal that I have described. The IAF has been researched from a political science perspective ( Boyte & Khari, 1996; Osterman, 2002, Warren, 2001, 2011), a theological perspective (Rooney, 1995; Stout, 2010), a psychological perspective (Rodgers, 1990), a sociological perspective (Gecan, 2002; Greider, 1992), and transformative learning perspective (Freidus, 2000; Scott, 1991). In this section, I consider key studies on the IAF in order to explore this community organizing approach, I look at what these studies have to say about the learning dimension within the IAF, and finally I explore some key debates regarding the IAF's potential for Strong Democracy.

### **The Industrial Areas Foundation**

The IAF is the largest community-organizing network in the United States with 57 affiliate organizations in 21 states (<http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org>). The IAF “seeks to develop the political capacity of community leaders to reach beyond their neighborhoods to influence powerful political and economic institutions” (Warren, 2001, p. 2). It builds organizations to gain political power necessary to rebuild their communities. The IAF's explicit goal is to “teach people how to do politics,” and in this way establish long-lasting community organizations (Osterman, 2002, p. 24). For IAF organizers citizens are not born with the necessary civic skills and virtues needed for communities to gain political power, these skills have to be



learned in public life (Chambers, 2003). Central to the IAF's organizing model is the development of civic leaders in order to change existing socio-economic and political power structures and reweave the social construction of their communities (Cortes, 1993).

IAF organizing was originally influenced by the ideas of Saul Alinsky (Coles, 2006; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Sandy & Schutts, 2011; Stout, 2010, Warren, 2011). Alinsky was a community organizer who worked in the United States from the 1930s to the 1970s. He is commonly referred to as the father of community organizing (Rodgers, 1990). Alinsky first began to organize in the 1930s with the Backyards Neighborhood Council in Chicago, and later on, he founded the Industrial Areas Foundation. He believed in the right of people to form voluntary associations for the purpose of speaking out on public issues and protesting wrongful doings by the governments. He also believed in the democratic ideal that people should be able to decide for themselves. He was never seriously attracted by Marxist ideology; however, he considered himself a radical. As described by Chambers (2003), to be radical is centered on being true to our spirit, which lies in the constant tension between the world as it is and the world as it should be. We need to face that tension and avoid drowning to the cynicism and coercion that result when we move either toward the world as it is, or the moralizing that follows when we move towards the world as it should be (Coles, 2006). This tension combines feelings of anger and yearning (Chambers, 2003). This definition of radical remains central to the IAF's organizing model.

Alinsky was very effective at running short organizing drives around issues of infrastructure, jobs, social services, schools, and housing, but his organizations often died out after a few years (Coles, 2006). Moreover, these organizations tended to move in directions that challenged their original “democratic and inclusive spirit” (Coles, 2006, p. 550). In addition, his organizers would often get burnt out (Coles, 2006). After Alinsky’s death in 1972, the IAF entered a period of critical reflection, looking at the changes that needed to take place for the organization to succeed (Coles, 2006).

Unlike Alinsky, because of their lasting relationship with people from faith communities, IAF organizers got interested in religious themes (Warren, 2001). Alinsky engaged church leaders in social action by getting them to reflect on their self-interest (Warren, 2001). The IAF’s organizing model has increasingly involved teachings from the Judeo-Christian tradition, and it is occasionally informed by other traditions such as Islam and Buddhism. This ecumenical approach to organizing is central to the IAF’s quest for a more lasting organization (Coles, 2006). The IAF is also much more intentional about having a diverse leadership, at broadening participation, and at being more open about practices that can strengthen the organization, unlike Alinsky’s more rigid organizing vision (Coles, 2006).

The following are some of the key principles behind the IAF’s current organizing model. The IAF forms broad-based grassroots coalitions with people drawn from all races, ethnic groups, and from different economic levels, in order to organize around people’s common values (family, dignity, justice, and hope), not around single

issues. The IAF is not a special-interest, single-purpose organization rather, it creates political organizations that are independent-nonpartisan. These organizations work with existing organizations in the community such as church congregations, schools, neighborhood associations, etc. The IAF fosters participatory democratic decision-making processes, it builds social capital (connections among individuals-social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them [Putnam, 2000, p. 19]), it gains political power, and it builds stable organizations (Boyte, 1996; Chambers, 2003; Gecan, 2002; Hess, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Warren, 1998, 2011; Stout, 2010). All of these organizing practices suggest the strong potential organizations like the IAF have for practicing Strong Democracy.

**Learning inside the IAF.** IAF organizers see leadership development as a central component of organizing strategy (Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2004, 2006; Cortés, 1993; Gecan, 2002; Hess, 1999, Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Rooney, 1995; Sandy & Schutts, 2011; A. Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001). The IAF has taken people who believed that they were powerless and has taught them to consider themselves effective political actors with the right to have their voices heard (Osterman, 2002). There are a few key concepts that foster the kinds of civic learning that takes place inside the IAF. They include the “iron rule” (don’t do for others what they can do for themselves), the “law of change” (there is no change without friction, or conflict), and the power of telling and re-telling stories. Tied to these concepts is an ongoing process of “research, action, and evaluation” (Chambers, 2003, p. 15).

The IAF utilizes three venues for people to learn the skills necessary for effective public action. The first one involves learning through action or experience particularly through relational organizing. Relational organizing entails an intentional building of relationships in order to find common ground for political action. As Chambers (2003) argues, the most radical thing the IAF practices is the relational meeting. This relational strategy helps sustain participation. One-on-one conversations are the engine that gives life to the IAF organizations (Coles, 2006). When an IAF organization is working well, one-on-one meetings are an everyday occurrence (Coles, 2006). This means individuals engage in conversations where they “provoke and listen to each other’s stories, angers, passionate dreams, specific issues and hopes” (Coles, 2006, p. 51). Relational meetings allow people to connect with each other and to confront each other. They help people identify talent and people’s energy (Coles, 2006). Telling these stories “opens a window into the passions that animate people to act” (Chambers, 2003, p. 44-45). Through the process of having relational meetings, IAF leaders learn about issues, develop strategies, and achieve a vision for the organization (Coles, 2006).

The relational meeting is the central piece of relational organizing and training of community leaders (Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2006; Gecan, 2002; Hess, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Rooney, 1995; Sandy & Schutsz, 2011; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998). Through memory (remembering personal stories of pain, anger, and injustice) and imagination (reflecting, reliving and reorganizing these memories), the passions that motivate people to engage in public life are identified and opened. This process helps people determine their self-interest. When a good relational meeting

takes place, two people connect in a way that transcends ordinary, everyday talk (Chambers, 2003). Relational meetings lead to house meetings, which involve groups of eight to ten leaders engaged in further telling of stories and crafting a collective vision through dialogue and reflection. Both individual and collective reflection are key components of the IAF's organizing strategy (Chambers, 2003; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Scott, 2004; Warren, 1998).

There are also non-formal educational forums such as seminars, workshops, and five and ten-day trainings conducted by the IAF (Chambers, 2003; Hess, 1999, Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Warren, 1998). The topics covered during those trainings may include:

- ☐ turning problems into winnable issues
- ☐ conducting relational meeting
- ☐ organizing turnout
- ☐ agitation
- ☐ self-interest
- ☐ power analysis
- ☐ leadership qualities
- ☐ meeting facilitation
- ☐ understanding media

- ☐ fundraising
- ☐ building teams of leaders
- ☐ organizing research actions
- ☐ public and private relationships,
- ☐ values and issues
- ☐ race and organizing
- ☐ effective negotiation
- ☐ the role of tension (Appleman, 1996; Warren, 1998)

One important aspect of all educational strategies employed by the IAF is that evaluation is integral to the learning that takes place inside the organization (Osterman, 2002). It is also important to point out the IAF's firm belief that, although some technical organizing skills can be learned in formal settings, most skills can only be acquired through learning in social action (Chambers, 2003; Warren, 1998). As Chambers suggests, IAF leaders "learn practical wisdom or social knowledge by dealing with others around life's everyday demands" (Chambers, 2003, p. 16). Practical knowledge is learned during times of challenge and struggle in action (Chambers, 2003). For this reason trainings involve participation in public actions.

Additionally, mentoring or tutoring is seen as essential for the development of IAF leaders. Mentoring involves the organizer or leader's commitment to investing time and energy in the development of other people. This means having regular one-

on-one interactions that foster growth, support, and encouragement; providing honest evaluation; and helping in learning the skills needed for participating in public life (Rodgers, 1990; Stout, 2010).

In his studies of IAF organizations in Texas, Osterman concluded that the teaching in the IAF happens at multiple levels (Osterman, 2002). The IAF changes people's conceptions of themselves. It teaches basic techniques of electoral politics. Leaders learn how to research issues. Leaders learn how to negotiate and compromise. The IAF also teaches confrontation. All of these learning experiences are the makeup of what IAF organizers refer to as "Schools of Public Life." Even though there are descriptions of some of the pedagogical approaches used by IAF organizers and even some descriptions of how leaders experience learning inside the IAF, there are very few that address the learning dimension specifically. Next, I discuss a study which I found useful in this regard.

Freidus (2000) investigated how increased politicization of individual citizens translates into concrete changes at the community level by looking at an IAF organization. Her investigation involved a case study of an IAF organization in the Rio Grande Valley of Southern Texas. She wanted to find out how individual transformation relates to building social capital. In her findings, Freidus (2000) argues that individual development is essential to the success of efforts to develop institutions and communities. She further suggests that in the context of community development, changes in individuals and changes in communities are mutually reinforcing. Her research shows that individuals undergo dramatic intrapersonal, cognitive, and

behavioral changes because of their participation with the IAF. In her conclusions, Freidus suggests that a greater understanding of, and attention to individual development is essential to the success of efforts to develop institutions and communities.

Looking specifically at the learning dimension within the IAF, Freidus (2000) concludes that IAF organizations provide spaces for adults to learn in the context of a community, spaces known as schools of public life or public universities. She argues that the IAF reinforces the idea that adults are capable of learning and developing, and it does so by providing community leaders with a classroom, a means tapping into the curiosity and potential of leaders. Freidus also contends that the IAF's pedagogy – one that begins where people are, with their own stories -- is based on experiential learning. Here she stresses the importance of reflective practices inside the IAF.

Freidus (2000) also argues that the education of IAF leaders takes place in a context where the individual learns as part of a collaborative. She points out that the education of leaders in the IAF is based on the connectedness between the individual and his/her community. She further asserts that the combination of engaging participants in a process of reflection and action and validating people's interest in their own development results in learning that is not only informational, but is actually transformational. Not only do individuals learn how politics in their communities works, they also learn a new way of thinking about themselves. In short, their growth represents a type of "civic development" through which individuals see both themselves and their relationship to their community differently.



She suggests that the practice of building relationships leads to an increase in social capital by becoming part of a collective, and this in turn leads to individual transformation (Freidus, 2000). She concludes by suggesting that if we ignore the stories of individual transformation, we construct an incomplete story of community change.

Although Freidus' (2000) research project looks at how learning takes place inside an IAF organization and attempts to understand the relationship between individual and community agency, it does so from a psychological perspective (it sees individual as well as social transformation as happening separately). She does not pay enough attention to how the dynamic between the social and the individual explains how leaders learn inside the IAF. Nonetheless, Freidus raises some interesting ideas for further research. For example, her findings suggest that individuals gain a new way of understanding power as they learn, and yet it is unclear to what extent the IAF fosters critical thinking—do individuals learn only to understand the IAF model of community organizing, or are they capable of critiquing and integrating this model with competing ideologies? What happens when individuals develop in such a way that they come to question the organization? Do people ever outgrow the IAF model? Is the role of community organizations to promote a specific way of understanding the world or to challenge people to determine their own way of knowing? Further studies should examine these issues within the IAF context, as well as compare the IAF experience with that of other organizing networks.

Although Freidus (2000) effectively raises important issues for further study, which she does not directly address in her own research project, these issues are central to understanding the IAF's transformative pedagogy. I discuss some of these issues further in the next section.

**Some debates around the IAF's organizing model.** Critics of the IAF argue that people and organizations that are not affiliated to the IAF tend to be overlooked by IAF organizers and leaders (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). In other words, there is little room for collaboration with organizations that may share similar goals and a similar organizing methodology, but are not formal IAF member institutions. As a result of this exclusionary tendency, the IAF has been described as isolationist in nature. If organizing is not done by the IAF, it is not good organizing (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Robinson & Hanna, 1994).

Another contentious issue relates to the scope of IAF organizing. The IAF's organizing model tends to address localized issues, thus disregarding larger systemic forces that can have an effect on its member organizations (Miller, 1987). It could be argued that by ignoring structural forms of oppression the IAF may be contributing to maintaining the existing socio-economic and political power structures in society, thus contributing to the reproduction of injustice and inequality (Coles, 2006; Marquez, 2000; Freidus, 2000).

Even though the IAF uses a transformative pedagogical approach, at the same time it may be strengthening the hierarchical control within its member organizations (churches, schools, unions). Because the IAF considers its relationship with church

communities essential for its success and attempts to assist in organizational development of these communities, it may be perceived as legitimizing the existing social structure inside these organizations (Robinson & Hanna, 1994). Thus, the IAF may be creating a false sense of transformation, one that appears liberating but in reality continues to be oppressive (Coles, 2006; Marquez, 2000).

Another critique of the IAF is tied to its lack of commitment to taking on controversial issues. Critics of the IAF contend that minorities are taught to put aside perceptions of racism as being part of the problems they face. Likewise, women are encouraged to ignore gender issues. Instead, leaders are encouraged to focus on developing a civic culture based on participatory democratic processes (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001; Robinson & Hanna, 1994). As expressed previously, the IAF may be creating a false sense of transformation and liberation among its members.

Finally, while some see the IAF as not radical enough, for others it is perceived as too radical. Conservatives argue that the IAF has a left-wing socialist agenda, while the left charges that the IAF is not ideological enough. Since the IAF's tactics have moved from the original Alinsky-style confrontation tactics to those of negotiation, this critique of the IAF may have some merit. As a result, the IAF's critics claim that its emphasis on creating stable organizations and its non-ideological stands make it an organization that uses a confrontational style to hide the conservative nature of its demands (Bystydzienski & Schacht, 2001). Furthermore, progressives have challenged the IAF for being reluctant to confront capitalism openly (Coles, 2006; Marquez, 2000; Martson & Towers, 1993).

In his review of four of the most important books written about the IAF, Romand Coles (2006) raises important issues regarding whether or not the IAF's pedagogical approach can enhance strong democratic practices. Coles defines democracy as "a politics that engages a manifold of people in the difficult reciprocities of active critical judgment, organizing, action toward common goods, more egalitarian distributions, and deepening acknowledgments of plural modes of being" (Coles, 2006, p. 547). Coles sees the IAF as one of "the most impressive efforts in terms of organizing durable grassroots democratic practices across a wide cross-section of people effecting modest but significant redistributions of power in cities across the United States" (p. 547), as scholars have suggested elsewhere. At the heart of the IAF's radical democracy "is the ability to craft a vision, practice, and power" (p. 547). It is also important to consider what Coles (2006) refers to as trickster politics, that is, "politics that plays one game (interest-group coalition politics aimed at redistributions that address pressing issues) in order more importantly to enhance another one (building radical democratic relationships, counter-culture, and power)" (p. 547).

As we can see, even though Coles sees the IAF as a venue for learning and practicing radical democracy, he still asks if proponents of democratization "strive to stimulate careful and sharp criticism of the larger deleterious forces, and place in the foreground of political dialogue questions concerning ways to engender political constituencies, capacities, relationships, powers, strategies, and critical –constructive visions that address these connections-even if this gives such work a more progressive stance" (p. 555). He suggests proponents of radical democracy need to proliferate

criticism and radical alternative horizons and paths of transition in connection with concrete action.

In this chapter I have characterized the IAF's organizing model and its potential for practicing Strong Democracy. Leadership development is a central component of the IAF's goal of building communities that practice Strong Democracy. Even though the IAF is a teaching organization, we know little about the learning dimension inside the IAF. Furthermore, in the studies that look at learning inside IAF type organizations, there is too little questioning of the IAF's pedagogy. Does this pedagogy enhance a process of social transformation, or does it merely contribute to the reification of the status quo? It is essential to look at what practices contribute to a transformative pedagogy and which ones limit such a pedagogical approach. Although both Coles (2006) and Freidus (2000) begin to ask critical questions about the IAF, and its ability to enhance Strong Democracy, little research has been conducted in this area. In order to better understand what practices enhance a strong democratic culture we need to further theorize/study Strong Democracy. Looking at learning in social action and transformative learning may help in this endeavor. I explore these themes next.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STRONG DEMOCRACY AND LEARNING FOR SOCIAL ACTION

I have argued so far that the key to reengaging citizens in social action lies in building institutions of different kinds that get people together to learn about and become interested in civic life. Strong local organizations are essential in teaching “skills, to educate people about political issues” (Osterman, 2002, p. 18), skills which are learned by participating in social action (Boyte & Kari, 1996; Barber 1984, Foley, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Schugurensky, 2003; Warren, 2001). This learning process ultimately leads to individual as well as social transformation (Barber, 1984; Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2001, 2003). The shift from being passive citizens to having a sense of individual and collective agency is linked to transformative learning processes. In other words, a central dimension of civic learning is tied to its transformative nature (Barber, 1984; Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2003).

Developing a theoretical framework for learning in social action informs a study of organizations that practice Strong Democracy. In this chapter I first seek insights from previous research in social action and transformative learning to address a central question: How does learning account for the ways Strong Democracy develops within IAF type organizations? Next, I consider research studies that facilitate the theorizing of strong democratic practices from a learning perspective, particularly transformative learning. I ultimately attempt to develop a conceptual framework for explaining particular experiences of learning in social action, arguing

that learning in social action involves different learning processes, and that there is an essential transformative learning dimension in social action.

### **Adult Learning in the United States**

There is an increasing body of literature in the field of adult education which converges on the premise that adult learning is a contested social activity (Cervero & Wilson, 2001; Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 1999; Hugo, 2002; Newman, 1994; Schugurensky 2003; Youngman, 2000). This learning paradigm challenges the dominant perspectives of the adult education field in the English-speaking world, which see learning as an individual process that focuses on the provision of technical skills in formal educational settings (Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 1999; Hart, 2010; Hugo, 2002; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Schugurensky 2002; Wilson & Hayes 2000; Youngman, 2000). This dominant tradition of adult education leaves out a great deal of adult learning. Since learning is seen as a rational, neutral (value free), psychological, and technical endeavor, issues of class, gender, and race are largely ignored (Bryant, Usher, and Johnston, 1997; Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 1999; Hart, 2010; Schugurensky, 2003; Wilson & Hayes, 2000; Youngman, 2000). Nevertheless, there is a growing interest and growing number of studies that try to explain the dynamics of learning in social action (Brookfield & Preskill, 2009; Foley, 1999; Fryer, 2010; Hall & Clover, 2005; Hart, 2010; Newman, 1994b; Schugurensky, 2003). In the next section, I will review the literature on learning in social action in order to explore the learning processes that take place within strong democratic organizations such as the IAF.

## **Conceptualizing Learning in Social Action**

Adult learning involves unlimited learning processes. If we move away from a purely psychological or cognitive notion of learning, conceptualizing learning in social action becomes a much more complex task. Bearing in mind the notion of learning as a contested and social process, I will look at a few useful attempts at conceptualizing the different learning processes that take place in social action. My intention is to come up with a conceptual framework that can be used in order to explain learning inside the IAF.

### **Habermas' Learning Domains**

In order to understand the learning that takes place in social action, I will first briefly describe Habermas' three learning domains. Habermas (1996) suggests that there are three main learning domains "which have very different purposes, logics of inquiry, criteria or rationality, or validating beliefs" (Mezirow 1991, p.8). In *Instrumental learning* (also referred to as learning of technical knowledge) learning is task-oriented and based on problem solving, empirical and logical explanations, and learning to manipulate the environment; *communicative learning* (also referred to as practical action) involves understanding the meaning of what others communicate concerning values, ideals, feelings, and moral decisions; and *emancipatory learning*, is a reflective process involving how history and biography have expressed themselves in our self-perception, our roles and social expectations. It challenges ideologies that have contributed to our dependency on reified powers. This critical self-awareness is emancipatory. Habermas' emancipatory learning domain, as stated previously has influenced Freire's conscientization process and Mezirow's perspective



transformation. All of these learning domains take place when we learn in social action, but for social action to address issues of oppression, justice, and power differences, the emancipatory domain must be at the center of learning (Schugurensky, 2001). Instrumental and communicative learning may take place without leading to social change.

### **Situated Learning and Social Action**

As discussed previously, the dominant assumption about learning is that it is an individual process. Lave and Wenger (1991) provide a different conception of learning that is helpful in describing the learning that takes place in social action. They argue that learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs. For them, social interaction is an essential component of learning. Learning is not seen as the acquisition of knowledge by individuals, but rather as a process of social participation. In addition, the learning process is significantly influenced by the nature of each situation.

Through a process of legitimate peripheral participation, learners take part in a “community of practice,” which involves its members learning a set of values, behaviors, and skills. More importantly, the learner or apprentice moves from the periphery of this community to the center or full participation. She/he becomes more active and engaged within the culture of this community of practice and eventually assumes the role of expert. This process usually takes place informally or unintentionally.

Rather than seeing learning as the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge, Lave and Wenger have tried to formulate a “theory of learning as a dimension of

social practice” (1991, p.47). Their learning theory provides a framework for bridging “theories of situated activity and theories about the production and reproduction of the social order” (p.47). Learning is seen as incremental participation in communities of practice that involves the “whole person acting in the world” (1991, p. 49). As Wilson (1993) explains, “learning is a recursive process in which adults act and interact with the context” (p.73). Furthermore, participation is based on “situated negotiation and renegotiation of meaning in the world” (Wilson, 1993, p.51). Most importantly knowledge and experience are in continuous interaction and complementary to each other.

Lave and Wenger (1991) based their theoretical framework on their study of learning in five different settings: Yucatec midwives, native tailors, navy quartermasters, meat cutters, and alcoholics. Their study suggests a few defining characteristics of situated learning. Through a gradual acquisition of knowledge and skills, novices learn from experts in the context of everyday activities. There is very little observable teaching; the more common occurrence is learning. Learning is an improvised practice. Furthermore, a “learning curriculum” developed as opportunities for engagement in practice took place.

Social relationships of the new members (or apprentices) within a community change through their participation. In the process, they have opportunities to “make the culture of practice theirs” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 95). From a largely peripheral point of view, the new learners progressively construct an idea of what makes up the practice and culture of the community. John Forester (1999) argues that through these processes people learn not only about what other people are like

(humble or not, trustworthy, reliable), but also what values people share. We also learn from the arguments people make or the information they share. In addition, we learn about people by paying attention to varying participatory rituals of meeting, talking, and listening together. These participatory rituals transform identities, agendas, and perceptions of value in the world (Forester, 1999).

Much of the learning that takes place during this process is supported by conversations and stories about difficult or problematic situations (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Telling and listening to personal stories become tools for diagnosis and reinterpreting meaning, and in the process, for helping the learners understand the community identity. The development of this identity is central in reaching full participation. Furthermore, learning and identity are indivisible. Finally, Lave and Wenger (1991) suggest that conflict between newcomers and more experienced practitioners will take place in participation. In this sense, conflict is experienced and negotiated in action.

### **Foley's Learning in Social Action**

In his studies of learning through struggle, Foley (1999) argues that when we study the learning that takes place in social action we can gather useful information about the dynamics and effects of popular organizations, or social movements. His research investigates the dynamics of informal learning and it shows that emancipatory learning in social action does not occur in a linear or developmental, but rather in a complex and often contradictory manner. Informal learning is “shaped by intra-personal, interpersonal and broader social factors” (p. 4). Foley argues that understanding these learning processes in the context of past and present struggles is

vital in crafting a truly emancipatory education and politics. Similarly, Hart (2010) suggests, radical democratic learning is not a linear process; it does not start with a critical reflection on an unjust system and where one is placed in it, followed by testing one's newly gained insights on one's daily practices and encounters. Rather, "the learners keep distancing themselves from, and are moving closer to a number of recurring points, each time creating a new loop in a growing and widening spiral" (p. 45). She also suggests "each learner starts at a different point of these spiral moves, but shares with others a longing, a yearning for community that is rooted in a collective sense of self, of being in relation with all living and nonliving things on earth" (p. 45).

Based on his study of a series of case studies of learning in social action, Foley also distinguishes three main types of learning taking place. For him, *incidental learning* occurs as people live and engage in social action; it takes place tacitly. *Informal learning* takes place when people learn from each other naturally and socially at work, with families, and in community organizations and social action. *Non-formal learning* results from structured systematic teaching, in a variety of social settings. Foley suggests that much of the learning that takes place in social action is informal and incidental, rather than non-formal.

### **Schugurensky on Learning in Social Action**

Schugurensky (2003) suggests a typology of educational activities which includes three subcategories: formal education refers to the provision of technical skills in highly institutionalized settings. Nonformal education speaks to the provision of workshops and short educational sessions where learning is seen as seen as an

outcome of those activities. The third category is referred to as informal learning and it involves *self-directed learning* (intentional and conscious learning), *incidental learning* (unintended but conscious learning), and *socialization* (unintentional and unconscious learning) (Mündel & Schugurensky, 2008; Schugurensky 2003). The preliminary findings of Schugurensky's research on social action suggest that much of the learning that takes place is either incidental or part of the socialization process. Brown, Collins, and Duguid (1989) and Lave and Wegner (1991) have reported similar findings in their research. Mündell and Schugurensky (2008) suggest that organizations that participate in social action could benefit considerably from a more deliberate approach to learning for its members.

Although Schugurensky's typology appears to be similar to Foley's, his use of self-directed learning is problematic. By equating self-directed learning to non-formal learning, Schugurensky is assuming that non-formal learning experiences are individual in nature, when in fact non-formal education can be also be defined as social in nature (for discussions on this subject see Lave and Wegner, 1991; Wilson, 1993).

### **A Conceptual Framework for Learning in Social Action**

Based on the perspectives just described, we can make the following claims about the learning that takes place in social action:

1. Learning in social action involves instrumental, communicative, and emancipatory learning. More than one type of learning may be taking place simultaneously in social action. There is an essential emancipatory or transformative learning dimension in social action.

2. Situated learning is at the core of learning in social action. This means that learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs. Social interaction (social participation) is an essential component of learning, which is influenced by the nature of each situation. Learning is a recursive process. Furthermore, through these processes people learn about what other people are like and what values people share. We learn from the arguments people make or the information they share. In addition, we learn about people by paying attention to varying participatory rituals of meeting, talking, and listening together. These participatory rituals transform identities, agendas, and perceptions of value in the world.
3. Emancipatory learning in social action does not occur in a linear or developmental manner, but rather in complex and often contradictory ways.
4. Much of the learning that takes place in social action is informal (intentional and conscious learning) and incidental (unintended but conscious learning), or socialization (unintentional and unconscious learning) Organizations that participate in social action could benefit considerably from a more deliberate approach to learning for its members.
5. The socio-economic, cultural, and historical contexts are intimately linked to what the learning in social action looks like.

In this section I have developed a conceptual framework for explaining particular experiences of learning in social action, arguing that learning in social action involves different learning processes, and that there is an essential

transformative learning dimension in social action. In the next section, I discuss this transformative dimension further.

### **Transformative Learning**

Humanist adult education and self-directed learning have been the two most dominant forces in the field of adult education (Foley, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Wilson & Cervero, 2002). In their quest for a more emancipatory adult education, adult educators have looked at critical theory to inform their theory and practice (Newman, 1994). Jumpstarted initially by Paulo Freire and Jurgen Habermas' ideas, and later by Jack Mezirow's, transformative learning has taken center stage for academic adult educators in the United States (Hart, 1990; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Taylor 1997, 1998, 2000, 2007, 2008). Although there continues to be a heavy emphasis on Mezirow's theory of transformation, there has been an increased interest in studying Paulo Freire's social-emancipatory conception of transformation (Taylor, 2007, 2008) and the role that class, race, gender and emotions play in transformative learning (Taylor, 2007, 2008). Freire's is explicitly a theory of transformation for social change, while Mezirow's is not. Nevertheless, much of the ongoing debate around transformative learning theory in the United States still revolves around Mezirow's theory of transformation. In this discussion I will consider some of the debates that Mezirow's theory of transformation has generated, particularly those concerning transformative learning in social action. I will also look at alternative perspectives on transformative learning in order to have a more comprehensive theory of transformation for social action.

### **Unresolved Issues in Mezirow's Theory**

Mezirow's theory of transformative learning (1978, 1981, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997) has generated much discussion in the field of adult education. Taylor's review of the transformative learning theory literature (1997, 1998, 2000, 2007, 2008) identified the following areas of contention around Mezirow's ideas: 1) his failure to establish the relationship of transformative learning to social action and power; 2) his decontextualized view of adult learning and rational discourse; 3) his goal of developing a universal adult learning theory; 4) his concept of adult development as shift or progression; 5) his emphasis on rationality, disregarding other ways of knowing; and 6) the components or steps in his model. The next section discusses the debates that are relevant to the development of a theory of transformation for social action.

**The role of context in transformational learning.** One of the bones of contention regarding Mezirow's transformative learning theory has been its decontextualized view of adult learning and rational discourse (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Hart, 1990; Tisdell, 1998, 2000). Clark and Wilson critique Mezirow's theory because it essentially situates perspective transformation within the individual learner while ignoring the role that the socio-economic, political, and cultural environment plays in giving meaning to the learner's experience. They argue that in Mezirow's original research of women returning to college, transformation is seen as a linear process and is flawed because, "experiences were studied as if they stood apart from their historical and socio-cultural context, thereby limiting our understanding of the full meaning of those experiences" (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 78). Clark and Wilson argue that Mezirow does not problematize the relationship between the individual and the



socio-economic and political cultural practices because, “human agency is assumed to be at least potentially more powerful than any inhibiting influences” (p. 81). There is a lack of balance in Mezirow’s theory because he gives great importance to the individual dimension at the expense of the social dimension.

For Clark and Wilson (1991), meaning and experience depend on context. Therefore, transformational learning has to speak to the way familiar and social history, gender, race, class, and the historical and socio-cultural environment shape, hamper and affect the learning process and actions that follow (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Finally, these authors suggest that a theory of transformative learning ought to make the most of, rather than play down, the effect that context has on the meaning and interpretation of experiences, and take into account the fact that rationality is “theory-laden, value-driven, community judgmental, and historically situated” (Clark & Wilson, 1991, p. 90). In other words, there is no meaning outside of the socio-cultural and historical environment (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009).

**Individual transformation and social action.** One of the most controversial discussions in the field of adult education, particularly within the transformative learning area, regards the relationship between individual transformation and social action (Collard & Law, 1989; Hart, 1990, 2010; Newman 1994a, 1994b; Taylor, 2000). The main critique of Mezirow is that he privileges individual change over social action (Collard & Law, 1989; Finger & Asun, 2001; Hart, 1990; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Taylor, 2000). This point is especially problematic since Mezirow bases his theory of transformative learning on Habermas’ theory of communicative

action. As explained previously, Habermas sees emancipatory knowledge (perspective transformation) as people's learning to liberate themselves from domination (Taylor, 2000).

Mezirow has been criticized for not having a theory of social change and social action (Collard & Law, 1989; Finger & Asun, 2001; Welton, 1995). In this regard, Collard and Law (1989) challenge Mezirow's proposal because it lacks a theory of social action and social change: "it is difficult to see how his ideas can be located within the European tradition of critical theory when they are largely devoid of the socio-political critique that lies at the heart of that tradition" (Collard & Law, 1989, p.105). Furthermore, Mezirow appears to have located emancipatory education within the context of a liberal democratic system, failing to acknowledge the sociopolitical critique from which emancipatory education was conceived (Collard & Law, 1989). Finger and Asun (2001) argue that Mezirow's theory focuses on how "adult learners adapt to, rather than criticize, society" (p. 59). Similarly, Newman (1994a, 1994b) argues that Mezirow's perspective transformation as "reintegration" is problematic. He contends: "if we accept reintegration as a satisfactory outcome, although the individual may be transformed, the oppressors may go unchallenged and the society these oppressors continue to act in may go unchanged" (Newman, 1994b, p.45). As Collard and Law argue, "it is his failure to address adequately questions of context, ideology, and the radical needs embodied in popular struggles [that] denies perspective transformation the power of emancipatory theory" (Collard & Law 1989, p. 105-106). Cervero and Wilson (2001, 2006)) argue that without a strong vision for

social change, critical reflection might be conceptualized and applied too broadly, and will most probably embody the interests of the most powerful.

**Transformative learning and power.** Another critique of Mezirow is that he ignores issues of power in his theory of learning. Hart (1990) argues that Mezirow ignores how power can distort communication, especially rational discourse. She asserts that Mezirow uses a power-free model of communication, and in doing so fails to see how it can affect processes of critical reflection. Mezirow's focus on ideal conditions ignores social and structural forces that can hamper or foster transformative learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Hart, 1990; Tisdell, 1998, 2000).

As we have seen, interesting debates tied to transformational learning have raged for many years. Most of the debates in the United States have revolved around Mezirow's dominant theory of transformation. The debates show the need to conceptualize ways of thinking beyond the current impasse, ways to think about a theory of transformation for social action that encompasses individual transformation theories, while at the same time bringing in ideas that can strengthen the relationship between individual transformation and social action. The next section attempts to do exactly this.

### **Learning as Social Transformation**

Paulo Freire has had a major influence in the field of adult education since the 1970s. His groundbreaking piece, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), provides a theory of transformative learning that is dialectic between the individual and the social. For Freire, education should be an instrument of liberation rather than one of

oppression. Emancipatory education is achieved through using a dialogical and problem-posing approach, rather than “banking” education (Freire, 1970).

According to Freire, education is a political act, which can be used to dehumanize (maintain the status quo) or humanize (bring about social change). Freire believes that a process of critical reflection will lead to action that develops political consciousness (conscientization), or the power to transform reality. The first step toward liberation is for the oppressed to critically recognize the causes of their oppression. Transformative education strives to break away from a cycle of oppression that Freire calls “domestication” (Freire, 1970).

Freire’s social transformative learning theory is based on critical reflection, dialogue, political participation, respect, and love. For Freire, it is important to have strong convictions, but at the same time to listen and submit human action to reflection (Freire, 1973). Transformation emerges through reflection and action. It is based on the idea of humans critically confronting reality and acting on it. This happens through dialogue and reflection about people’s actions. It happens by co-intentional education through common reflection and action, and the re-creation of knowledge (Freire, 1973).

For Freire, as described previously, human activity is based on action and reflection. It is praxis that transforms the world, but this praxis requires theory to guide it; human activity is theory and practice. Freire’s pedagogy compares two theories of cultural action. He first characterizes the antidialogical theory of action, which has four main types: conquest, divide and rule, manipulation, cultural invasion. All these types of action are used by the elites to oppress and dominate the lower

classes. On the other hand, Freire speaks of a “cultural revolution” based on dialogue and education. This dialogical theory of action is based on cooperation, unity for liberation, organization, and cultural synthesis. The latter theory ultimately aspires to liberate the oppressed from their oppression (Freire 1970, 1973).

### **A Critique of Freire’s Theory of Transformation**

Freire’s ideas provide a means by which the oppressed may develop strategies for ending their oppression. Not only does Freire present a useful political analysis of power structures, he also provides practical information for jumpstarting a process of critical reflection on structural oppression. Freire’s work has also contributed to the idea that education is not neutral but rather political in nature. Freire argues strongly in favor of the view that power is the ability to create one’s own knowledge, and this knowledge should lead to action and societal change (Freire, 1973).

Nevertheless, there are some limitations in Freire’s pedagogy. First, he differentiates the oppressed and the oppressor based only on a class analysis, while ignoring gender or race differences. He does not account for internal power struggles that the oppressed may endure. He fails “to include the experiences of women or to analyze or even acknowledge the patriarchal grounding of Western thought” (Weiler, 2001, p.74). Furthermore, his pedagogy sees the teacher as the superhuman savior of the oppressed, which contradicts the idea of freedom from hierarchical power. Second, his arguments lack ideas about ways in which the oppressed can develop truly democratic processes. For example, Freire promotes dialogue but fails to address the need for deliberation or negotiation of power and interests. It is possible that even though he is advocating for equality, his pedagogy actually contributes to the

perpetuation of oppression. There is a certain resistance on his part to address questions of patriarchy (Weiler, 2001). The following section considers approaches to social transformation that complement Freire's ideas.

### **Transformative Learning and Ideology Critique**

Brookfield presents a perspective that supports Freire's ideas, by asserting that action and reflection are integral to transformative learning. Brookfield (2000, 2006, 2012) argues that reflection is not necessarily synonymous with critical social change. He further suggests that it is possible for educators to work reflectively and at the same time focus exclusively on technical decisions. The fact that this type of reflection is uncritical does not mean it is not useful. Brookfield suggests that critical reflective processes ought to lead to the "uncovering of paradigmatic, structuring assumptions" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 126). For something to be considered critical reflection, analysis, or learning, "the participants must engage in some sort of power analysis of the situation or context in which learning is happening" (p. 126); participants enter a process identifying hegemonic assumptions.

Ideology critique must be at the center of critically reflective processes (Brookfield, 2000, 2006, 2012; Brookfield & Holst, 2010). Ideology critique "describes the process by which people learn to recognize how uncritically accepted and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices" (Brookfield, 2000, p. 128). Critical reflection as ideology critique allows people to come to an awareness of how the capitalist system influences their beliefs and assumptions. These assumptions serve to justify, maintain, and reproduce economic and political inequity (Brookfield, 2000, 2006). In other words, at the center of

criticality is the understanding and challenging of dominant ideologies. Making sense of those ideologies means knowing how they are “embedded in the inclinations, biases, hunches, and apparently intuitive ways of experiencing reality that we think are unique to us” (Brookfield, 2000, p.129). Without ideology critique as part of critical reflection, the process of analyzing our assumptions may be reflective but not necessarily critical (Brookfield, 2000, 2005). Ideologies--sets of values, beliefs, myths, explanations, and justifications that appear self-evidently true and morally desirable--are shaped by the cultural group to which we belong. “Ideology is not to be understood as pertaining only to our beliefs about social, political, and economic systems, but as something that frames our moral reasoning, our interpersonal relationships, and our ways of knowing, experiencing, and judging what is real and true” (p.130). Ideologies are hard to penetrate because they are seen as representing widely held commonsense understanding and as springing from the particular circumstances of our lives. Critical reflection becomes transformative when it generates challenges to hegemony, when it jumpstarts counter-hegemonic action (Brookfield, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2012; Brookfield & Holst, 2010). Brueggemann (1987) presents a useful framework for studying how these processes take place.

Brueggemann (1987) uses the Exodus story from the Bible<sup>1</sup> to describe what he calls the process of “faith formation.” He argues, “Israel’s narrative is never, and never intends to be, substantively neutral, for Israel’s faith is characteristically passionate in its partisan claims that concern both religious matters and social reality” (p. 7). For him, the Bible is concerned with communal and personal transformation,

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<sup>1</sup> The Exodus story in the Bible describes Israel’s escape from slavery and oppression in Egypt.

and it uses narrative as this tool for social transformation. Biblical narrative “intends not only to report on an ancient transformation but also to evoke and generate transformation in each new moment of its hearing” (p. 9).

Brueggemann emphasizes the importance of the “social construction of reality” in shaping people’s identities. By looking at the Exodus story, he argues that individual personhood is always a communal endeavor. Transformation is about interaction in which the person is evoked, assaulted, and impinged upon in formative and transformative ways. He goes on to “propose three dimensions of this transformative redescription of life and personhood” (p. 10): ideology critique, the public processing of pain, and the release of a new social imagination (Brueggemann, 1987).

**Ideology critique.** Brueggemann (1987) argues by using the example of Israel that the first dimension of faith transformation and social change is the critique of ideology. He contends “faith development consists in seeing the destructive power of the empire clearly and in having the freedom to act apart from and against it” (p. 12). He argues, as Israel did, that the oppressed can critique the dominant ideology in narrative form. He contends that the proper telling of an alternative story can destroy dominant ideologies, as was the case with the people of Israel. The retelling of this story in turn helps us remember who we are. Brueggemann suggests that story is the only way to get at the pain that will lead to action. The Israel story both discloses how its people were enslaved and mediates the power to undertake transformative social action (Brueggemann, 1987).



**The public processing of pain.** In the case of the Exodus story, Brueggemann tells us the Pharaoh did not willingly give up his power. Following Brueggemann, Israel's separation from Egypt was not happy or congenial. He contends that for change to take place, the issue must be forced from underneath. The victims of the enmeshment must make the first move, but precisely because they are victims, they cannot make such a move as was the case with the people of Israel. As he suggests, they are paralyzed or intimidated through a carefully nurtured symbiotic relationship of dependency upon the system. In this regard, the purpose of social criticism is to create a basis for a bold move of disengagement. Social criticism and exposure to the dominant ideology are important, but they only give insight. "Power and authority to move in the face of imperial definitions of reality come from the public processing of pain" (Brueggemann, p. 16).

By public processing Brueggemann means "an intentional and communal act of expressing grievance which is unheard of and risky... As long as persons experience their pain privately and in isolation, no social power is generated" (p. 16). "When there is a meeting, there is a social anger that generates risky, passionate social power" (p.17). Most importantly, "the cry of pain begins the formation of a countercommunity around an alternative story. The source of that countercommunity is trusting one's pain and to trusting the pain of one's neighbor which is very much like our own" (p. 17). This public processing of pain permits and encourages redescription, "which gives a chance for newness" (p. 19). For Brueggemann, ideology critique comes first; that is precisely what allows us to notice pain. The act of pain is an act of defiance and protest; it is an act of hope. The act of pain starts new action, a new vision.

**The release of a new social imagination.** Brueggemann (1987) explains that when our pain becomes public or is voiced, “there is a new ability, courage, and will to hope, imagine design and implement alternative scenarios of how it could be” (p. 21). We now possess an alternative story, which allows us to imagine an alternative reality and vision for the future.

### **Transformative Learning, Participatory Democracy, and Social Action**

Daniel Schugurensky (2001) provides a useful way of looking at the relationship between transformative learning, participatory democracy, and social action. He does this by describing his research on the participatory budget in Porto Alegre in Brazil, as well as his studies about the United States civil rights movement. Schugurensky argues that learning in social action “is the result of a combination of assimilative, expansive and transformative processes, in which both the emotional and the rational dimension are at play” (Schugurensky, 2001, p. 61). One of the central arguments he makes is that there is not necessarily a causal relationship between changes “in individual consciousness, changes in individual change, and social change” (p. 62). When he looks at the relationship between critical reflection and transformative learning, Schugurensky contends that there is a tension between the more traditional process-oriented and psychologically grounded transformative learning theory and the more outcome-oriented, radical adult education learning theory, which is more sociologically grounded. For him, overusing the word “critical” has led to confusion between transformative learning and critical reflection. Further, he argues that transformative learning cannot happen without critical reflection;

however, critical reflection can happen without an epistemological change (Schugurensky, 2001).

For Schugurensky, a supportive social environment, a social reality that is susceptible to transformation and a sense of community is vital in producing the conditions for social transformation. This supportive social environment is essential in explaining the links between individual and social transformation. Importantly, when these conditions are not present, critical reflection will most likely not lead to transformative social action. In fact, it can contribute to “cynicism, paralysis, and general feeling of helplessness” (p. 62). Most importantly, Schugurensky argues that “critical reflection, without an accompanying effort of social organization and without concurrent enabling structures to channel participation in democratic institutions, can nurture the development of individuals who become more enlightened than before but who (because of their realization of the immense power of oppressive structures) may become more passive and skeptical than before” (p. 62). As argued by Schugurensky (2001), social transformation will not necessarily happen out of individual critical consciousness. Therefore, assuming that individual transformation will lead to social transformation is not always a useful way of thinking about social transformation. From a Freirian perspective, “transformative learning is real transformative learning when critical reflection and social action are part of the same process” (Schugurensky, 2001, p. 63).

For Schugurensky, perspective transformation cannot happen on its own. It requires a “process of participation in constructive discourse, in which participants deliberate about the reasons for their actions and get insights from the meaning,

experiences and opinion expressed by others” (2001, p. 64). In other words, learning takes place in community. Influenced by Habermas’ discourse theory and Freire’s ideas on critical consciousness, Schugurensky argues that transformative learning necessitates the presence of different perspectives and must permit dissenting views to be expressed. These conditions will promote the development of socially responsible citizens who can participate effectively in decision-making processes, and a new civic culture tied to participatory democracy and civic education (Schugurensky, 2001).

Finally, Schugurensky argues that there is a reciprocal relationship between transformative learning and participatory democracy. For him, transformative learning can promote participatory democracy and vice versa. As he states, “transformative learning can improve the quality of citizens’ participation in democratic institutions, and at the same time democratic participation itself creates powerful opportunities for self-transformation” (2001, p. 67). Transformative learning improves citizens’ participation in democratic institutions by developing capacities for critical reflection, through deliberation. This can lead to developing communicative capacities, which when applied in public life can improve democratic processes. On the other hand, participatory democracy creates spaces for learning and transformation. Through their active participation in public life, deliberation and decision-making inside organizations that impact people’s lives, citizens engage in substantive learning and can experience both incremental and sudden transformations. As Pateman (1988) and (Berry, Portney and Thomson 1993) state, participatory democracy provides the most educational opportunities for those involved. Participatory democracy will “move people from a narrow self-interest to an understanding of the common good”

(Schugurensky 2001, p.68). While I find Schugurensky's ideas useful, I contend that participation without an explicit transformative pedagogy and practice will not necessarily move people from a personal understanding of self-interest to an understanding of the common good.

### **Scott's Theory of Social Transformation**

Scott (2004) provides a useful insight that complements Schugurensky's theory of transformative learning. Scott's research with the IAF explores the degree to which transformation occurs in individuals who assume leadership roles in broad based organizations (Scott, 2004). Based on her findings, Scott concurs with Schugurensky and Freire by arguing that transformation is not just a personal occurrence but is also socially constructed. She maintains that transformation is connected with "building relationships and participative action as leaders learn in a powerful social action context" (2004, p. 264). Transformation entails comparing the individual and social constructions of reality. This process leads to the transformation of the mind, the body, "and not only the personal body but the body politic" (p. 265). Scott contends that transformation involves a structural change at the personal level (a world view change), a developmental stage change (a personality change), and a permanent public role change. Scott argues "the psychic structures within an individual that are subject to change revolve around psychoanalytic discoveries of the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious" (p. 265). In addition, transformation requires social structural changes in institutions (churches, schools, community associations, unions), city administrative structures, and market driven-

businesses and corporations. All of these social structures comprise what Scott refers to as the body politic.

One of Scott's most important arguments is that the social construction of transformation emerges simultaneously in the learner and the setting. They both transform in a dialectical relationship. For Scott, knowing and knowledge are not just concepts but instead comprise an immense collection of contextual material that is "unformulated and enacted in every moment of existence" (2004, p. 281). Social construction nested in the body politic gives people the opportunity to act on this undigested material--or what they know but have not expressed. In other words, dialogical learning processes (critically reflective dialogue incorporating an active questioning process of invisible assumptions about the self, society, role, and responsibility that have been internalized and acted on) are taking place while participating in public life. This dialogical learning process can in turn lead to new action, new thinking, and new behavior (Scott, 2004).

### **Transformative and Restorative Learning for Social Action**

Elizabeth Lange's (2004) study of how transformative learning contributes to revitalizing citizen action provides a very useful theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between transformative learning and social action. In her study of 14 university extension program participants, Lange found that there is a dialectic relationship between transformative learning and what she calls restorative learning.

The central finding of Lange's study is that there is a dimension of transformative learning identified as restorative learning, a unique learning process

working, which is restorative as well as transformative (Lange, 2004). This dialectical relationship did not transform the participants' principles and values, as the literature on transformational learning would predict. Rather, Lange's research revealed that the most important transformation experienced by the participants in the research was due not to a disorienting dilemma, but rather to the restoration of their core values and ethics. As Lange, describes "as the participants began to restore some forgotten relationships and submerged ethics, they also experienced a transformation of their world view, habits of mind, and ways of thinking" (p.12). Getting reacquainted with their core values gave the participants stability and allowed them to be open to reflect on and engage in a critique of dominant cultural values and adopt new ones in the process.

As Lange explains, "restorative learning grounded the participants to withstand the disorienting aspects of transformation and remain open to threatening new knowledge" (2004, p.14). This process also restored forms of relatedness, changing old social relationships. Finally, Lange contends that although there is plenty of literature that critiques the liberal economy and democracy and sees participatory democracy as a solution, there is not enough literature on the learning processes that link "what is" and "what could be," that goes beyond the dominant learning traditions.

### **Social Transformation and Storytelling**

For those people who do not have social, political, or economic power, cultural narratives that are available are negative, narrow, or written by others for them (Brueggemann, 1987; Rappaport, 1995). The goals of transformative learning are realized when people discover, develop, and give voice to, a collective story that

supports their personal life story positively. This is a reciprocal process; many individuals, create, change, and sustain the collective narrative. In other words storytelling is central to personal and social transformation (Coles, 2006; Ganz, 2001; Polletta, 1998; Rappaport, 1995; Young, 1996). Furthermore, proponents of storytelling in social action suggest that storytelling may be what most distinguishes Strong Democracy from Thin Democracy (Coles, 2006; Ganz, 2001; Polletta, 1998; Rappaport, 1995; Young, 1996).

Much of the work of progressive social transformation may be about understanding and creating spaces where people participate in the discovery, creation, and enhancement of their own community narratives and personal stories (Rappaport, 1995). In this sense, encouraging people to identify, develop, and tell their own stories, individually and collectively, is essential to a transformative pedagogy within organizations that work towards social change (Rappaport, 1995). Storytelling constructs agency, shapes identity, and motivates action (Bruner, 1990, 1991; Ganz, 2001; Rappaport, 1995). Through storytelling we construct shared understandings of how to manage the risks of uncertainty, anomaly, and unpredictability grounded in remembering how we dealt with past challenges (Amsterdam & Bruner, 2000; Bruner, 1986, 1990, 1991; Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Polkinghore, 1988).

Our identity is made up of a lifetime of stories in which we have participated as tellers or listeners, which we weave into a larger story (Ganz, 2001). Since storytelling involves interactions among speakers and listeners, this process enhances cultural formation. Our individual identities are intimately linked with those with whom we share stories, and with whom we enact, retell, or transform them (Ganz,



2001). When we interact with others and participate in a shared story, we learn to tell a new story about ourselves; we learn to reinterpret the experience we share, in order to guide new action. This whole process helps us develop new stories. Action is important because it results in new experiences and more stories (Ganz, 2001). The interpretation of the new experience depends on the story that we choose to tell about it, thus encouraging further action. Moving ourselves to act in ways that give us the opportunity to reconstruct our experience is a critical step in social action. Storytelling involves translating our values into the emotions that enable us to act (Ganz, 2001). Rappaport (1995) argues that “it is difficult for people to develop their personal stories on their own. Change cannot be sustained in the absence of a group that supports that change, in part through the experience of a shared community narrative...Everyone needs a community narrative to support one’s personal story, especially if that life story is being newly created” (Rappaport, 1995, p. 804).

Storytelling allows us to access the emotional resources for the motivation to act towards those ends (Bradt, 1997; Brueggemann, 1978; Peterson, 1999; Sarbin, 1995). Stories become our moral or emotional learning, which allow us to have the courage, love, and hope we need for dealing with the fear, isolation, pain, and hopelessness which limits our action (Jasper, 1998). Stories enhance individual and collective action, but new action requires taking risks. Our willingness to take risks is rooted in our emotions, which are in turn rooted in our values. One way we can translate our values into emotions that inspire action is by telling stories.

### **Conceptualizing a Theory of Transformation for Social Action**

Based on the perspectives I have just described, the following concepts are essential components of a theory of social transformation.

- Transformation is socially constructed.
- Transformation is tied to critical dialogue, political participation, and reflection. Transformative learning in social action requires ideology critique.
- Transformation is a dialectical process among individuals, groups, and the socio-cultural and historical environment.
- Transformation emerges simultaneously in the learner and the setting.
- There is a reciprocal relationship between transformative learning and strong democratic practices.
- There is a dialectical relationship between transformative learning and restorative learning.
- Storytelling is central to individual and social transformation. Storytelling has the potential to be a powerful factor for both personal and social transformation

So far, I have established that there is a crisis in our current democratic system. Proponents of a way out of this crisis suggest that a key to engaging people in public life is Strong Democracy. For them, changes have to happen at the local level, within organizations of civil society. Furthermore, local experiences are schools for effective citizenship and civic learning. Political capacities for engaging in civic life are learned through social action. In this review of literature I have developed a useful framework for understanding the learning that takes place in social action. This learning process ultimately leads to individual as well as social transformation.

I have argued that because of the dominance of theories of transformation that focus on individual development, a comprehensive theory of transformative learning for social action is needed. I have developed a theory of social transformation that pays attention to the role of contextual factors (gender, class, race, and the socio-cultural and historical environment) and power, as well as the relationships between individual development and social transformation, restorative learning and transformative learning, and participatory democracy and transformative learning. I have established the reciprocal relationship between strong democratic practices and transformative learning practices. I have also demonstrated that a number of scholars have raised questions about the nature of learning in social action. In light of the literature reviewed, I claim that learning and education in social action play an essential role in revitalizing democracy. It is therefore crucial that we study these processes in depth; indeed, adult educators that aspire to bring back Strong Democracy must turn their attention to this type of learning. The IAF becomes an ideal organization for this type of research. In the next section I explain my inquiry paradigm and methodology employed in conducting this research.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### INQUIRY PARADIGM AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to observe and document the extent to which political learning and citizenship for Strong Democracy are enhanced by learning and education for participants in the IAF. After providing a critical overview of the theoretical debates within the nature of inquiry in the social sciences, I explain why I have chosen a social constructivist and critical realist framework for this study. Considering this framework, I then describe my research design and methodology.

#### **Inquiry Paradigm**

A study of these questions and the ones I have been asking throughout this dissertation requires my commitment to a qualitative, social constructivist (Fish, 1989; Gergen, 1985; Schwandt, 1998) and critical realist (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1989, Collier, 1994; Porter, 2002) inquiry paradigm. The following are some theoretical perspectives that have influenced my inquiry paradigm: 1) learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs (learning is a recursive process in which adults act and interact with the socio-cultural, cultural, and political environment), and 2) social interaction is an essential component of learning (knowledge is acquired through social participation). In this chapter I build on the constructivist insight that all knowledge is a product of the social context, but also consider the need to address the social, cultural, and economic structures, which determine, constrain and oppress human action. For this reason I have chosen an inquiry paradigm that attempts to bridge the gap between structure and agency. In other words, one that seeks to overcome the dichotomy between interpretivism and

structuralism. I begin this chapter by briefly critiquing positivist social science. I then discuss the constructivist and social constructionist perspectives. Finally, I look at the critical realist perspective in order to establish my inquiry paradigm. I then explore the methodological aspects of my research project.

### **Positivist Science**

For positivist inquiry, explanation, which enables the prediction and control of physical or human behavior, is its main goal (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, 2004). Positivist science sees knowledge construction as the process of “verifying hypotheses that can be accepted as facts or laws” (Guba & Lincoln 2004, p. 31). There is only one reality that can be broken down into pieces, which can be studied in isolation. In other words, “it looks at the correlations among variables...often associated with research that employs experimental or correlational designs, quantitative measurement, and statistical analysis” (Maxwell, 2004, p. 5), in order to understand causality. Positivist research has the goal of replicating investigations in order to generalize across studies. In doing so, Maxwell (2004) argues positivism rejects the prospect of identifying causality in specific cases. This refers to Hume's idea that “we cannot directly perceive causal relationships,” only what he called the "constant conjunction of events" (Maxwell, 2004, p. 4). As such, it denies the significance of context as a fundamental part to causal processes. Positivism's focus on quantifying decontextualized single and multiple variable correlations in order to infer causality does not help us to easily understand the meaning of human action and interactions in specific settings.

Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) argue against such a positivist perspective. For them, all human action is meaningful and therefore needs to be interpreted and

understood “rather than methodically known in a natural science sense” (p. 181). In order to understand the meaning of human action, it is essential to understand how the construction of meaning is imbedded in beliefs, practices, and assumptions that are shaped by culture (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997). The problem with this notion is that there is not a universal standard of any human behavior that does not include some contaminating contextual factors, such as race, class, gender, and culture. They can only make sense in relation to the actor’s intentions or reasons for carrying out the action. To recognize these intentions accurately is to grasp the subjective meaning the action has to the actor. Descriptions of actions must have an interpretive component. Actions always embody the interpretation of the actor, and for this reason can only be understood by grasping the meanings that the actor assigns to them. One task of social science is to interpret these meanings and in this way make sense of human action (Usher, Bryant & Johnston, 1997).

### **The Constructivist Paradigm**

Lincoln and Guba argue that the goal of inquiry should “be understanding and reconstruction of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming toward consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve” (2004, p. 30). They further contend that there are multiple constructed realities, which we are not required to predict or control. They suggest that what is real is a construction in the minds of individuals, and that there are multiple, often conflicting, constructions, which are all potentially meaningful (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). They also point out that objective knowledge and truth is the product of perspective. Thus, “knowledge and truth are created not discovered by mind”

(Schwandt, 1998, p. 236). For Lincoln and Guba, humans do not discover knowledge so much as construct or make it. They also contend that humans make up concepts, models, and schemes to make sense of experience and, further, they continually assess and change these constructions based on new experiences (Schwandt, 1998). While Lincoln and Guba provide useful insight into the nature of inquiry, they do so from a subjective perspective. In doing so, they pay little attention to how inquiry is shaped by the activity, context, and culture in which it takes place (Lave, 1988). In doing so, they contribute to the dichotomy between agency and structure (Porter, 2002), by grounding social action as either a primary effect of agency or as a primary effect of structure (Giddens, 1984). This approach does not address the inherent inequalities tied to intersubjective and structural relationships of power. In other words, constructivism provides an understanding of human interactions that falls short of explaining how social structures and processes influence these interpretations (Porter, 2002). An approach that comes closer to addressing these issues is social constructionism.

### **Social Constructionism**

Rather than focusing on individual minds and cognitive processes, social constructionists look outward to the world of “shared intersubjectivity, social construction of meaning and knowledge” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240). Kenneth Gergen (1985) labels this approach social constructionism because it explains the notion that the world people create in the process of social exchange is a unique reality. This method works under the assumption that “the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people”

(Gergen, 1985, p. 267). It focuses on “the collective generation of meaning as shaped conventions of language and other social processes” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 240).

According to Stanley Fish (1989), “reality is the result of the social processes accepted as normal in a specific context, and knowledge claims are intelligible and debatable only within a particular context or community” (p. 241). While this perspective goes beyond subjectivism by seeing learning as shared intersubjectivity, as a collective generation of meaning, it still falls short in providing an alternative for overcoming the dichotomy between interpretivism and structuralism. By only paying attention to interchanges among people, it still neglects the importance that structural relationships of power have in understanding the meaning of human action and interactions in a particular setting. It also provides no explanation of the place for ideology critique and action.

Usher, Bryant, and Johnston (1997) add a useful perspective to the social constructionist approach. They contend that meaningful human actions entail more than a reference to the conscious intentions of persons. They also involve understanding the social context within which such intentions make sense. This social character of actions implies that actions arise from the networks of meanings that individuals acquire through their past and present participations in various social orders and practices which structure their interpretation of “reality” in a certain way. For this reason, a task of social science is to uncover the set of social rules which make sense to a certain kind of social activity and so “reveal the structure of intelligibility which explains why any actions being observed make sense” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p. 89).



Social constructionism provides us with two very important epistemological and ontological ideas. First, is the idea that the social world, as we know it, is socially manufactured through human interaction and language and not just the product of individual minds. Secondly, social constructionists argue that our understanding of the social world is historically and culturally specific. In other words, the setting is essential in understanding the world. Even though these ideas are important to consider, the various constructivist perspectives tend to give too much weight to subjective interpretations of individuals, while falling short of how larger social structures and processes influenced those interpretations. They argue against the notion that there are essential structures within society that can contribute to the explanation of human interactions. Critical realism provides a useful way to address these issues.

### **Critical Realism**

The critical realist perspective provides a useful inquiry paradigm that complements some of the ideas that are expressed in the social constructivist approach, yet addresses the more socially situated and structured aspects of human interaction. Porter (2002) argues that phenomenological research (hermeneutics is the parent tradition of this notion which is also similar to constructivism, interpretivism, and naturalistic perspectives), “relies on uncovering, in an unproblematic fashion, the subjective interpretations of individuals, at the cost of examining how social structures and processes influenced those interpretations” (Porter, 2002, p. 57). In this sense, the limitation of interpreting behavior to the meaning that is generated subjectively overlooks the prospect of “deeper analysis of the social situation encountered by the

ethnographer” (p. 57). In other words, the phenomenological assumption that individual interactions and interpretations are enough to understand human interaction, leads to superficial analysis. Critical realists see understanding the interpretations of the individuals as an essential condition for sociological knowledge; but it is not enough (Porter, 2002). Social research should be grounded on a methodological model that can provide a deeper understanding than subjectivism is capable of; it should be grounded on one which is able to link the “subjective understandings of individuals with the structural positions within which those individuals are located” (Porter, 2002, p. 57).

An appropriate social research model should include an understanding of the importance of subjective meanings as the source for social action, and an awareness of the danger of making absolute claims about those understandings. At the same time it would have to go beyond them, in order to account for patterns of social behavior (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1989; Collier, 1994; Porter, 2002). It would be a model that recognizes that there is a reality that both is individual and extends beyond individuals, but which does not overstretch its assertions about how much the outer reality dominates the decisions of individuals.

Critical realism contends that in the natural and social world there is a reality out there independent of our thoughts, and that it can be distinguished into three levels: the empirical level consisting of experienced events; the actual level, comprising all events whether experienced or not; and finally, the causal level embracing the mechanisms which generate events (Bhaskar, 1989, 1998). This last mechanism is central to the work of critical realists. Another key idea behind critical

realism is that causal mechanisms in the natural world operate in “open systems” (Bhaksar, 1989). Thus, critical realism argues that the natural world comprises a range of heterogeneous systems each with their own distinct mechanisms. The combined effects of such countervailing mechanisms ensure that we can never predict the outcome of any intervention. Thus critical realism does not promote determinism, but rather posits that mechanisms produce “tendencies” (Bhaksar, 1998).

Bhaksar (1989) provides a similar analysis when it comes to the social world. For him, psychological mechanisms as well as structural ones influence human actions. He proposes an approach that focuses on the identification, analysis, and explanation of psychological and social mechanisms and their casual tendencies. However, Bhaksar is careful to point out that rather than being at the mercy of these mechanisms, a person can actively transform his or her social world and is in turn transformed by it (Bhaksar, 1989).

Porter (2002) argues that critical realism examines the structuring of human relations using the criterion of whether they enhance or hamper the “human freedom and dignity of those involved in them” (Porter, 2002, p. 63). Social science should reveal the structuring of relations, and use that knowledge as the foundation for informed action to eliminate the causes of structural oppression. Critical realism contends that although, as phenomenology points out, human activity is conscious, it cannot be only explained in terms of individual consciousness. This is because the social context where an individual lives provides the conditions for consciousness, and the broader social effects of actions may not be those consciously planned by the individual (Porter, 2002).

Lastly, structure and action are viewed as different but mutually dependent (Porter, 2002). Structure and action have separate realities of their own which function on different timescales (Porter, 2002). What present actions do is either preserve or transform already existing structures (Giddens, 1984; Porter, 2002). However, transformation of structures through action is seldom an immediate process, for two main reasons. First, not everyone in society acts in the same way and there will often be groups in society who benefit from the status quo, and who will therefore have the motivation to resist change. Second, the structural conditions pertaining will often place limitations on the pace of change (Porter, 2002, p. 64).

In this chapter I have made a case for an inquiry paradigm that where knowledge construction is based on the collective generation of meaning. One where the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people. I built on the constructivist insight, but also considered the need to address the structures, which determine, constrain and oppress human action. I have attempted to move beyond the current impasse in social research by engaging interpretivism and structuralism.

### **Research Design**

The design for this project was an ethnographic case study drawing heavily upon critical realism (Archer, 1995; Bhaskar, 1998; Collier, 1994; Porter, 2002). From a critical realist perspective, the role of ethnography is to examine and make sense of the actions of individuals as part of a process of uncovering the relationship between agency and structure (Porter, 2002). Following a critical realist perspective, ethnography is used as a method to uncover the manifest interactions of the social

world, which are then subjected to the transcendental process of theory generation to infer the structural conditioning of those interactions. It is also used subsequently to test the veracity of theories concerning the nature and effects of the structure pertaining (Porter, 2002). While critical realism continues to use ethnographic techniques to gather data, it abandons many of the methodological assumptions normally linked to ethnography, such as the idea that the subjective understandings of individuals will sufficiently explain human interactions. Critical realism uses ethnographic information to shed light on structured relations. It also shows how these relations may be oppressive, and directs us to the actions needed to make them less oppressive (Porter, 2002).

An ethnographic case study “is a socio-cultural analysis of the unit of study” (Merriam, 1988, p. 23). Interest in the cultural context is what differentiates this type of study from other qualitative research. A case study represents a research approach in which a researcher investigates a particular phenomenon, limited by the time and activity (a program, event, process, institution, or social group), and collects in depth information by employing a variety of data collection procedures during a continuous period of time (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988). A case study design is useful because it examines in detail a distinctive phenomenon in a particular social context, particularly when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are not obvious (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1993, 2003). Case studies are descriptive, holistic, heuristic, and inductive. They are especially beneficial for their rich description and heuristic value. Case studies are either descriptive or explanatory; that is, they portray events, processes, and perspectives as they develop (Yin, 2003), and

frequently construct an explanation for those events. Description exemplifies the intricacies of a situation, portrays how the course of time has shaped events, provides vivid information, and introduces diverse perspectives or opinions (Patton, 1990; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1993, 2003).

According to Merriam (1988), the following are the four main characteristics of a qualitative case study. It is particularistic in the sense that it focuses on a specific situation, event, program, or phenomenon. As such, it can indicate to the reader what to do and what not to do in a similar circumstance, analyze a specific case but shed light on a general problem, and could be influenced by the author's bias. It is descriptive in nature; the end product of a case study is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study. It has a heuristic quality, and as such it "illuminates the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study"; it can lead to "the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known" (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). Finally, a case study typically relies on inductive reasoning. In other words, it is based on uncovering new relationships, concepts, and understandings (Merriam, 1988). Merriam (1998) maintains that case studies are especially helpful because they provide contextual interpretations for understanding learning processes and revealing unique features of a research phenomenon.

For example, this study explored how leaders experienced learning in social action. In order to do so, I chose to conduct an ethnographic case study of an IAF organization in Tucson, Arizona. I provided a "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) of the phenomenon under study, in order to explain why it takes place. If I had chosen to use a constructivist approach, I would have probably come to conclusions based on the

subjective interpretations of individuals. As a result, I may have found no inconsistencies between PCIC's espoused pedagogy and its cultural practices. A critical realist perspective was useful in this case, because it attempted to explain the origin of this paradox. In other words, there were structural mechanisms that influenced individuals' attitudes. As I expressed before, individual interactions and interpretations are important to understand human interaction but there is also a reality that extends beyond individuals. Therefore, in this research project it was important to consider an approach that also addressed the structures which determine, constrain, and repress human action. Such an approach allows a person to actively transform her/his social world and simultaneously be transformed by this world.

### **Data Collection**

Case studies usually employ a variety of data gathering methods, which include participant observation, key informant interviews, focus group interviews, life histories, and document analysis (Merriam, 1988, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1993, 2003). The strength of case studies is their detail, complexity, and use of numerous sources to obtain multiple perspectives. A case study that uses several methods is helpful in terms of "validating and cross-checking" or "triangulating" emerging ideas, constructs, and interpretations, and is more likely to enhance the soundness and trustworthiness of the results of the inquiry (Patton, 1990, p. 244).

A "multi-method triangulation approach" for collecting data was used in this research project, which included participant observation, key information interviews, focus group interviews, and document analysis (Patton, 1990, p. 245). I began with *participant observation* of organizational planning and development processes and

activities (including staff meetings, leader and core team meetings), training sessions, public events, and the typical day-to-day activities of the organization and its members. As the project continued, I conducted *key informant interviews* with selected organizers and community leaders. The data produced by observation and interviewing was supplemented by the *analysis of written documents* (training materials, published documents, meeting minutes and transcripts, newspaper articles, relevant texts, videos, photos, etc.).

### **Data Analysis**

A constant comparative method formed the basis for analysis. This method was used to “triangulate” data sources “by comparing and cross-checking the consistency of information derived at different times and by different means within qualitative methods” (Patton, 1990, p. 466). Analysis took place through a process of “reflective interpretation” whereby data was reiteratively analyzed at multiple levels. As Merriam (1988) explains, “without ongoing analysis one runs the risk of ending up with data that are unfocused, repetitious, and overwhelming in the sheer volume of material that needs to be processed” (p. 124). The central aim of using this approach was to reduce a large quantity of qualitative data into a series of categories, fundamental dimensions, and main themes (Merriam, 1998). This was “a process whereby the data gradually evolved into a core of emerging theory” (Merriam, 1988, p. 144). This core was “the theoretical framework that guided the further collection of data” (p. 144). It required active review of the data, and looking for links and patterns among them (Patton, 1990). As the theory solidified, fewer iterations took place, as I compared the next incidents of a category to its properties (Merriam, 1988).



In moving between empirical material and critical interpretation, I took seriously the constructed, constructing, political, and gendered nature of social research without letting anyone of these positions dominate (Alvesson & Scholdberg, 2000). Particular attention was paid to the historical and structural contexts in which this study took place (Porter, 2002). I did this by gathering historical records of PCIC and PCIC sister organizations in Arizona. I also gathered socio-economic and political data for the state of Arizona, the local county, and the city of Tucson. In addition, I collected data from observations and key informant interviews where the focus was to gain an understanding of the socio-economic, political and cultural factors that shaped how PCIC leaders experienced learning inside the organization. Reflection on, interpretation, and evaluation of actions and their outcomes formed another basis for analysis. I did this by reflecting on my field notes and all other data collected, and comparing my interpretations with those of PCIC leaders, colleagues, and peers. Finally, the process of analysis involved ongoing conversations with academic colleagues and committee members.

Merriam (1988) argues that case studies require three levels of analysis. I first organized data chronologically or thematically in a narrative that was mostly descriptive. At this point, the focus was the description of the phenomenon being observed. Links among the data were not made at this moment, but rather I began to set boundaries on data that was relevant (Merriam, 1998). The second level of analysis involved “category construction” (Merriam, 1998). It entailed developing themes that interpreted the meaning of the data. Constant comparison was essential to this process. After observing PCIC meetings and trainings, and conducting interviews with key

PCIC leaders and organizers, and several reflection iterations on the data, I was able to identify emerging themes and eventually group them into larger categories. Once these categories were reduced and connected, the analysis moved to a “theory building” level. This level of analysis went beyond the category formation stage because “a theory seeks to explain large number of phenomena and tell how they are related” (Merriam, 1988, p. 146), rather than predict or control phenomena as positivist research does.

### **Quality Criteria**

Merriam (1988) argues “all research is concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner” (p. 163). As a researcher, I sought to make sense of the meanings participants’ attached to their experience engrossed in the IAF, as well as the transformation and changes that took place as the consequence of the research process. For this reason, I followed the epistemic criteria of *trustworthiness* (which parallels positivist criteria) in order to guarantee the quality of knowledge, and *authenticity* (which arises from constructivist assumptions) to make certain of the goodness of the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1998, 2004). To insure the trustworthiness of the knowledge claims I used Guba and Lincoln’s (1989) multiple methodology. The four criteria used to ensure trustworthiness included: credibility (how do I know if my interpretation of the process I have studied is right? ), dependability (which is tied to the idea of reliability: the capacity of another investigator to repeat the results), transferability (referring to the generalizability of the research findings to other contexts /cases), and confirmability (referring to the idea

that the findings are not the researcher's imaginary constructions, and can be traced to the primary source) (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Consider each in turn:

1) Credibility: Through triangulation I employed various researchers, multiple sources of data, and several research methods to verify the emerging findings (Merriam, 1988). I used member checks and took data and interpretations back to the people where the data originated, and asked them if the findings were conceivable. I scheduled a second interview with key PCIC leaders and organizers to get feedback on my findings. This process took place throughout the study (Merriam, 1988).

Credibility also involved a two-year observation of PCIC staff meetings, executive committee meetings, leaders' assemblies, public actions, trainings, and conversations with leaders and organizers where there were recurrent observations of the same phenomenon. Peer examination required seeking colleagues' observations on the findings as they surfaced. I had regular conversations with colleagues in my department as well as discussions with professors and community organizing practitioners. Finally being aware of the researcher's bias necessitated to be clear about my assumptions, worldview, and theoretical stands at the beginning of the study. I was able to do this by keeping a field journal and comparing my interpretations with those of PCIC leaders, colleagues, and peers.

2) Reliability: This idea is problematic since a positivistic perspective assumes there is a single reality which, if studied repeatedly, will yield similar results. In fact, human behavior is always changing, never static (Merriam, 1988). In qualitative research there may be many interpretations for the same phenomenon. Rather than thinking in terms of reliability Lincoln and Guba (1988) suggest thinking about "dependability"

or “consistency.” This means that rather than coming up with generalizable results, “the validity of a knowledge claim depends on the force and soundness of the argument in support of the claim” (Polkinghore, 2007, p. 475). In order to make sure that the results are dependable the following considerations may be useful: a) the investigator’s theoretical assumptions need to be transparent, b) the choice of participants should be explained by the researcher, c) the researcher should use triangulation and peer audits, d) the researcher should keep track of changes on element design and e) assure transparency on those changes.

3) Transferability: The traditional positivist interpretation of transferability is also problematic. As I stated previously, positivism’s focus on quantifying decontextualized single and multiple variable correlations in order to infer causality does not help us to easily understand the meaning of human actions and interactions in specific settings. As Merriam argues, “generalizing from a single case selected in a purposeful rather than random manner makes no sense at all” (Merriam, 1988, p. 173). Merriam (1998) suggests that rather than thinking in terms of traditional transferability, we ought to think in terms of the reader or user of the study. This means that the “reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study’s finding apply to other situations up to the people in those situations” (p. 177). In order to achieve this, the researcher should provide “thick descriptions” so that anybody concerned with transferability has the right information (Merriam, 1988). This study provides a rich and nuanced description of the dynamics of learning inside PCIC so that community organizing practitioners can identify elements that can be transferable to other contexts.

4) Confirmability: To assure confirmability I incorporated substantial segments of quotations of the information gathered to show the meaningfulness and reliability of the categories.

Authenticity criteria, rather than looking at validity of knowledge, looks at claims to whether a research process supports reciprocity, brings to light minority voices, empowers study participants, provides spaces for open discourse, and raises critical consciousness or encourages action (Guba & Lincoln, 2000). In other words, did this study surface participants' voices, and broaden their personal constructions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, 1998)? I reflected on these questions throughout the project.

In the following chapters, I look at the data that I gathered during my two-year participation with PCIC. Next, I describe PCIC, the context where it operates, and the experience of the participants through their interviews and my observations.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PIMA COUNTY INTERFAITH COUNCIL AND THE ARIZONA SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

The following socio-economic and political account of the Pima County Interfaith Council and Arizona is based on two years of participation in meetings, trainings, and interviews with PCIC leaders and organizers, and state and local elected officials and community leaders. During this time, I found that the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC) had been operating in Tucson, Arizona, for fifteen years. In the early nineties hundreds of community leaders were trained to organize PCIC style. By the mid-nineties PCIC was seen as a powerful player in Tucson politics, but most importantly it was the premier training organization for community leaders in Tucson and Arizona. Since then, changes in the country, the state, and Tucson have impacted how PCIC organizes and trains leaders. During my two-year investigation of PCIC, it had moved away from its more traditional organizing practices to focus most of its energy on mobilizing leaders. This shift was done in response to these local and state changes. While organizers emphasized the importance of doing relational organizing, in practice this was done only sporadically. What follows is an exploration of how this phenomenon has took place.

#### **My First PCIC Meeting**

During the first PCIC meeting I attended when I began my research, I found out what the organization's plan of action for the next few months would be. As it turned out PCIC was jumpstarting its summer activities with this meeting. An organizer explains,

Last year we lost the mayoral elections by 900 votes. We did not do our job. Because of that loss, we are having a hard time getting anything done here in Tucson. We have learned in 14 years of organizing in Tucson, that large actions and accountability sessions are not enough. We need people to go to the polls and vote. For this to happen, we need to begin by developing a solid house meeting campaign. We also need to engage all of our institutions in conversations around elections, and for that we need to develop a script with ground rules for our leaders as well as questions for conversation. The purpose of these conversations with people is to ask them to register to vote and get them to register others to vote. In the process, we will identify a number of institutions and build core teams. We need to have house meetings in 10 to 20 institutions. We also need to conduct precinct analysis in preparation for the 2005 city elections. Although we have no races in the November 2004 elections, we do have an issue we need to learn about. We attended an organizers and leaders meeting in Phoenix where we learned about the Protect Arizona Now (PAN) initiative, which may be on the November ballot. We know it is similar to 187 in California, and a group called the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR) spearheads it. We need to learn more about it, read the PAN initiative and figure out how we teach it to our leaders. So, our plan is to build core teams and relationships, to get ready for the elections and possibly an anti-PAN initiative campaign.

For the next four months PCIC leaders would get people to fill out early voting ballots, register new voters to vote, organize research actions<sup>2</sup>, and would educate the community on issues relevant to the November 2<sup>nd</sup> elections. Throughout this process, leaders were reminded by the organizers that the voter registration campaign was supposed complement the relational work of leaders and organizers, the work of

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<sup>2</sup> Research Action: The process of having relational and house meetings informs leaders about what is happening in people's lives. The stories that people tell represent the issues and items that need to change to improve people's lives. The more relational a leader is, the more she or he will learn about the hardships people are facing. This translates into research actions, where leaders join teams to deepen their understanding of those issues. This involves learning who the stakeholders are, who makes decisions around the issue, who supports it and who is against it, what are the regulations or policies at stake, who else needs to be part of this conversation, who should we meet with to further understanding of the issues (elected officials, community leaders, academics) among others. Research actions provide and an opportunity for leaders to have a deeper understanding of issues provides them with the skills to conduct participatory research, and above all, they are leadership development opportunities.

having individual and house meetings. Building relationships would be the central task of the organization. This message was told and retold at almost every meeting I attended during the summer. The plan made a lot of sense. Use the voter registration and election issues as a tool to identify leaders and thus connect them and their institutions to PCIC. This whole time PCIC leaders were to have relational meetings, and develop strong institutional core teams<sup>3</sup>.

### **My Initial Impressions of PCIC: Organizing or Mobilizing for Action?**

Soon after I began participating with PCIC, I noticed that the relational and house meetings were rarely happening. Leaders would say things like, “There is no time for reflection. We are always in mobilizing mode.” “We are tired of all this action.” At most of the meetings I attended during the summer, twenty or thirty of them, there seemed to be an honest interest and will to do more of the relational work. Based on early conversations with most of the Arizona organizers, there seemed to be a clear understanding of the importance and urgency of finding leaders, developing core teams, and reviving and rebuilding the organization. These conversations would quickly shift into planning for organizing voter registration campaigns. “How many leaders are you going to bring to this weekend’s walk?” “Can you bring some of your leaders to do phone banking tomorrow?” Leaders were participating in two or three planning and reporting meetings a week on top of voter registration drives, making phone calls, and going on neighborhood walks. There were meetings and trainings taking place all the time (staff meetings, steering committee meetings, Arizona

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<sup>3</sup> Core Team: PCIC’s primary focus is to train leaders on the principles of relational style organizing so that in turn they can build teams of five to ten leaders inside their institutions. Core team members are responsible for formulating proposals on behalf of their institutions as well as training leaders from their own organizations.



Interfaith Network (AIN)<sup>4</sup> organizer meetings, AIN leaders meetings, and PCIC leaders meetings). People seemed to move at a frantic pace; there was little time to slow down. Leaders often felt like organizers were pushing people rather than asking them to participate. For example, one of my first Sundays in Tucson, an organizer called me on a Sunday afternoon demanding that I go to a local park to register people to vote that evening. When she called me, she did not ask me if I could do it. In a demanding tone she said to me, “You and your people need to come to Kennedy Park to register people to vote tonight.”

When I said to her that this was very late notice and that I had other plans, she exploded. She said,

Where is your commitment to your leaders and to this organization? I’m giving up my Sunday as well. Can’t you even commit a couple of hours to do this? At least call other leaders and get them to come.

She tried to make me feel guilty and get me to do something I did not want to do. I finally told her I would not do it, and if she wanted to get other leaders to participate, she should call them herself. After that incident, she did not talk to me for about a month. People’s participation during this time seemed to be based on guilt and pressure.

Another organizer told me the first week I was in Tucson,

Robert, I just moved back to Tucson a couple of months ago, and I found an organization that needs a lot of work. As you know, it’s just me and a part time

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<sup>4</sup> AIN is a statewide coalition of IAF organizations. AIN leaders are asked to gather about once a month in Casa Grande, AZ, which lies at the center of the state. The meetings often start at 5 or six in the evening and usually last for two or three hours. During the day, all of the Arizona organizers gather to talk about what the later large meeting will look like, to discuss and learn about the current political state of the State, discuss readings and how they relate to the organizing work, reflect on the work each organizer is doing and to develop a storyline to be able to organize at the local level.

organizer, and a few volunteers that will be helping out this summer. My job is to rebuild this organization; we only have 2 or 3 active core teams. You should work with some of our churches for your research and try to get some core teams going.

In effect, I found out that there were only three active core teams in PCIC. I noticed that most of the organization's most experienced leaders were putting between six to 10 hours a week volunteering with PCIC. At times, it felt like there was no focus, just people running around all over the place.

For four months, leaders visited schools and churches and went on neighborhood walks. They made announcements and presentations about the upcoming elections, and got thousands of parishioners registered to vote, and committed to get others to vote. Leaders felt good because they were getting the numbers of newly registered voters, but energy seemed to slowly dwindle. Organizers were feeling the pressure of having to fulfill voter registration quotas. At most of the AIN meetings that I attended during the same period of time, organizers had to report on how many people had been registered to vote. Although the organizers understood the importance of relationship building, and they constantly reminded leaders to do the individual meetings, something was different this time around.

### **PCIC's Heyday**

The Pima County Interfaith Council was founded in 1990. That year Ernesto Cortes, the Southwest Regional Director of the Industrial Areas Foundation, came to Tucson in the hope of founding an IAF sister organization in Tucson. He was eventually able to form a sponsoring committee, mostly made up of church leaders. My first contact with the organization took place in 1993. At the time, there were five

organizers working in different areas of the city, and by then PCIC had grown to over fifty member organizations. PCIC is made up of mostly Catholic congregations, but also Methodist, Unitarian, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Lutheran, and Jewish ones, a few educational organizations, and a few unions and neighborhood associations. Between 1990 and 1999, PCIC had won many battles at the city and county levels as we will see later in this chapter. In the process hundreds of leaders learned how to organize inside their institutions (Source PCIC documents, AIN website, conversations and interviews with leaders and organizers).

At its peak, there were seven organizers in Tucson, and there was a strong core of well-trained leaders running the organization. The following excerpt from an interview with one of those leaders captures the culture of PCIC in the early to mid-nineties. Many experienced leaders I interviewed also give similar accounts about PCIC.

I felt a very strong personal connection at that time from a number of people, working with the Southside schools, and Southside Neighborhood associations, and I liked working with Nelly a lot, I connected with her a lot. I felt a good relationship with Steve at that time, very much so. He would look me up every time there would be a training or a seminar, I would always get a call from him. He made sure I knew he wanted me to be there. I used to go to all of the Monday morning staff and leader meetings; they were well attended at that time. They were very vital... There would be an agenda. First of all you'd do the rounds, and these were not just like, "Oh yeah. Have a nice day and turn around?" This was serious stuff; what have you been thinking about? What have you been doing? How have you changed? What are you struggling with? That level of talk was something that didn't happen elsewhere... That was personally invigorating for me, it made me think more, it made me feel like I could express anything in that group. It also made me feel I was respected in that group. Sometimes it would be invigorating, sometimes it would be challenging; it would be difficult, it was a pain in the neck... It was always challenging and often invigorating to be at those meetings and be in connection with other leaders. I think that sense of community that was there at those meetings, also the reading sessions that we had, and trainings... There was

always the drive to tell a story, and that was something I wasn't used to, to tell a story, to be personal not just analytical. To see people at different levels, different expertise, expertise isn't the right word, but different levels, willingness to be vulnerable, to share their experiences with others; a lot of people were a real inspiration to me. Some organizers in particular I have always liked, it is like a high you'd get; it can be so exciting to be in a seminar given by them.

I would love to see that whole element of education and reflection reenergized. I don't mean that we have to pay big money to fly leaders to Boston or New York, but right here in Tucson. Just with the institutions that are in this area. We can get together and say "let's reenergize." All this fundraising stuff is important, but it turns people off. It is hard work; they [PCIC] need to have someone that's professional who can do that. You can't expect all of your leaders to be fundraisers...Let's refocus on the education and the reflection like it used to be. Let's get some of these leaders in, and let's talk about Nehemiah and Saint Paul, or let's talk about Ed Chambers or whoever wrote some good books on organizing, or the reality of what's happening today in labor; just educational stuff, and let's reflect on it. That energizes people; I know that energizes me. We used to do that. I think that would be a good thing to look into. I think that organizers would feel like they are really feeding the leaders. People can say now my stomach is full, I'm ready to go to work. You can only operate so long on an empty stomach. If you don't reflect, if you don't read, if you don't study, it's just activity. There has to be more substance.

As we can see from these excerpts, PCIC was a vibrant organization back then.

It was vibrant because of the focus on mentoring, building relationships, education, and taking time to reflect. During that period, there was a majority of elected officials, at the city and county governments, which supported PCIC's family agenda around immigrant rights, afterschool jobs for youth, living wages, home care for the elderly, and support for adult education programs. PCIC leaders were able to implement many programs at the local level. For example, in 1992, PCIC got the City of Tucson to adopt a Child Friendly/Family Friendly Strategy that included a \$4 million expansion of city funds for after-school programs and summer youth employment. Leaders then leveraged this success to obtain an additional 4 million dollars from the Pima County

Board of Supervisors for similar programs in the rest of the county. Leaders from PCIC congregations volunteered to teach citizenship classes for Pima County Adult Education and 2,000 of their students became citizens. In 1997, conversations with parents and school officials at a local high school in Tucson led to the creation of School Plus Jobs, a nationally recognized program of after-school jobs on campus directed by parents and with the active involvement of the parents of youth in the program. Parents were able to obtain funding from the County Board of Supervisors and then convinced the school board to accept the funds. One of the most impressive efforts took place between 1996 and 1998. The following excerpt from an interview with a PCIC leader describes this time.

### **JobPath and the Fight for Job Training in Tucson**

During the early nineties I got involved in organizing, because the classes that I was teaching in an adult education program were about to get thrown out of a neighborhood center. In the process of fighting against that happening, I became involved with PCIC. They had been working in Tucson for about five years and had just become a regular member of a national Interfaith Network. Our students would always go to the PCIC meetings and talk about how difficult a time they had trying to take care of their families, pay their bills, go to school, and have a decent career with a living wage job.

This excerpt conveys the importance that people's stories had in crafting the direction and vision for the organization. Every meeting and training would begin with leaders having relational meetings. At these gatherings people would talk about the challenges that Tucson families faced, as the excerpt illustrates.

By 1995, PCIC decided that it was time to talk about the economy of Tucson. Our first step was to hold an economic summit. By then the organization had been successful in local politics, all the politicians were interested in attending, and since we were talking about economics from a poor person's point of view the business community was interested too.

As we can see in this in the previous narrative, PCIC was perceived a powerful player in Tucson politics.

We held our economic summit over a couple of days in the fall of 1996. It was well attended and it got a lot of press. The most interesting thing about it was the u-shaped main table that seated forty GED students, politicians, ministers, and community activists. The experts came from all economic levels and each got a chance to talk about what they felt could be done.

This excerpt illustrates the importance that diverse voices had for the organization.

The GED students were as much the experts as the “experts.” People from the immigrant and Mexican-American community played a central role throughout this time. The following narrative further illustrates the role of research campaigns in developing the leadership skills of the GED students.

We had been holding research meetings for close to a year in schools, churches and neighborhood facilities about what would it take for people to be successful in terms of jobs, money, and training. We also spoke about what the people who got the training and jobs would later do for their communities. We came up with our own proposal that was part of an overall plan that we called the Family Development Fund, which was eventually supposed to be a ten million dollar fund to help low income families. The JobPath [PCIC’s job training initiative] part of it was based on the premise that there were good jobs available for properly trained people. We decided that we would seek commitments for living wage jobs from area employers. We figured we could find the jobs and match them to adult education students and other community people who needed training and work. The whole community would get involved in that we would recruit mentors to help the folks through the process. We would use existing community resources, from schools to training groups, etc., in order to do the training. The actual trainees would also be expected to pay back their loans by doing community work. The adult education students insisted that would keep the participants from having a welfare mentality and the funders from seeing it as a give-away program.

Back then PCIC encouraged leaders to go out to the community and listen to stories in order to learn about the issues affecting the families in Tucson. It also encouraged

leaders to develop expertise in areas such as job training as part of their development as leaders. PCIC leaders were involved at all stages of the organizing cycle (relationship building, core-team development, research actions, public actions, and evaluation). Organizers knew that leaders' full participation in the cycle of organizing would produce strong and committed leaders. The following excerpt further illustrated this point.

The students who would actually be involved in the JobPath program, we're involved in all aspects of it of making it happen. Whenever we sent a group out, there were always a few students to speak for themselves, and they met with all the local political figures. They met with the area businessmen and talked to them about promising jobs. They talked to all the bureaucrats from the community development block grant programs and with all the county and city bureaucrats that helped to pull strings. Some even were invited to churches that belonged to PCIC to speak about JobPath at churches all over the city.

This narrative also conveys the importance that experiential learning had for PCIC organizers. Notice that the learning that took place back then was not only incidental and tacit in nature, but there were also ample nonformal learning experiences, as the following excerpt captures.

My role [as an experienced leader] was to train people how to speak publicly and how to express themselves when they met with these different business or political people. Teachers invited me into their classes, and we'd talk about who the mayor was, and how he made his decisions. We discussed why a businessperson would be interested in JobPath. What was in it for them? There was a lot of background work as part of our research work. As we researched the issues, we found out who our allies were, and who was willing to help us. We decided to come up with a very solid plan and then push for it. At one point we had ten different committees to look at each aspect of the whole program. One looked at the political, one looked at the business people, and one tried to find mentors to help people when they got into it. One committee designed a plan to do the recruitment of candidates in the community, one tried to figure out what sort of payback work the graduates might do, and another agreed to research the bureaucratic process of how we could get the money in order to do it. We invested in the development and training of the adult ed.

students, and they then spoke for themselves. The students input, constant involvement and enthusiasm, was to my mind what made it work in spite of a lot of other difficulties. The employers and politicians were just as impressed. The students' development, training and involvement were the key.

As we can see, during the 1990s PCIC was intentional about creating diverse learning opportunities for leaders. PCIC's success was not only in the training and development of leaders; it was also successful at winning important political battles in Tucson, as the following excerpt shows.

This was just a very significant undertaking in that we involved well over a hundred key leaders, not to mention all the other people that they worked with. PCIC worked on the JobPath program for about two years, and our efforts culminated in a series of different votes that were all phenomenally close. But we actually won, at both the city and the county level. The city and the county designated general revenue moneys to initially fund the program, half a million from each entity. This was for the first year, and it was supposed to be a five-year program, renewable if it worked out well.

Through the initiatives of PCIC leaders, the City of Tucson and Pima County adopted living wage ordinances for contract workers (security guards, janitors and landscapers), which required that they pay at least \$8.00 per hour with benefits or \$9.00 per hour without benefits. In 1997, PCIC secured over two and a half million dollars from the city and county governments for the construction of two learning centers for Pima County Adult Education. Because of PCIC's organizing work, over 20 million dollars in public funds have been directed towards programs for poor families in Tucson (Source PCIC documents, AIN website, interviews with PCIC leaders). Most importantly, hundreds of community leaders were identified and trained in the process. By the mid-nineties, PCIC was seen a powerful political player in Tucson.



By the late 1990s, things began to change inside PCIC. There was low energy among leaders, and a perception that the organization was losing steam and political clout. As a result, PCIC leaders fired one of the organizers working for PCIC at the time. By then, there were only three organizers working in Tucson, and by the time I left the organization in 2000, only two were working with PCIC. Between 2000 and 2003, there was some effort to revive PCIC. More organizers were brought in, but by 2004, all of them had decided to leave, and PCIC faced a moment of great crisis. A former organizer was brought in 2004 with the explicit goal of rebuilding the organization. By then, there were four other IAF organizations in Arizona, and by 2000 an umbrella organization was created, the Arizona Interfaith Network (AIN) (Source Interviews with PCIC leaders). The focus of PCIC leaders and organizers now was on supporting AIN, and developing a statewide organizing strategy.

In addition, political changes began to take place in the late 1990s, which have affected the work of leaders and organizers in PCIC. In 2000, a new mayor and two more conservative Republican city council members were elected to office in Tucson. They favored interests of businesses, developers, law enforcement, and provided little or no support to poor families in Tucson. There was now a new majority at the city council. As a result, the funding of many of the programs, which PCIC had once fought for, was systematically cut. PCIC entered a long phase of not being able to affect policy or politics at the local level. As a result there was a strong push for mobilizing leaders to participate in electoral politics and in this way regain support and political clout at the local level.

## **Changes in Local, State, and National Politics**

Through my participation with PCIC during my research, I also learned of changes at the state level that affected the organizing culture of PCIC. PCIC organizes thorough trainings for leaders and organizers to understand the politics, economics, and history of Arizona. By participating in these trainings and conversations, I learned that Arizona has traditionally been considered to be a Republican State, very conservative at times. Nevertheless, some moderate political voices have been able to make it in Arizona. Republican Senator John McCain represented this moderate political tradition in Arizona. In addition, Janet Napolitano a Democrat had been elected as governor in a Republican State. Because of this conservative political agenda, one that discourages public spending for social programs, Arizona continues to rank at the bottom of most socio-economic indicators. According to the United States Census bureau, in 2010 one out of five Arizonans lived below the federal poverty level. This figure translates to about 1.4 million people in Arizona earning less than the federal poverty level. The Census Bureau also found that the poverty level for children in Arizona reached 31.3 percent or one in four of Arizona's children; one in four children in Arizona struggles with food insecurity. Southern Arizona, including Tucson, has traditionally supported Democratic candidates, while Phoenix has been a Republican stronghold. Tucson supports more progressive agendas, while Phoenix has been much more conservative on social issues. Governor Janet Napolitano won the State governorship because of the voters of Southern Arizona.

When Governor Napolitano was first elected, the State legislature was composed of a large group of moderate Republicans, a Democratic minority, and a

small group of far right Republican conservatives. Because of this strong moderate Republican majority, the Governor was able to build alliances with moderates from both parties, and this way continue supporting most social programs that helped the poor in the State. This political alliance enabled a brief period of stability when the governor was first elected.

A few key events conspired to change politics in Arizona dramatically, since Governor Napolitano was first elected in 2002. The September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center led to fear of further attacks. This culture of fear generated a growing anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States, and particularly in Arizona. At the same time, Arizona was the state with the highest influx of undocumented immigrants in the United States. The combination of September 11 events, the fear of terrorist attacks, a large influx of immigrants entering the state, a conservative political agenda, and an economic system that isolated communities and individuals, provided the right mix for major changes in the state. These factors ultimately led to a community where fear dominated public discourse, where conservative ideologies gained ground in the state, and where political dialogue was virtually non-existent.

As a result of this fear driven environment, in the November 2004 elections, far right conservative Republicans unseated many of the moderate Republicans who had originally worked closely with Governor Napolitano and the Democrats. The governor had very little room to negotiate with the Republican Party. Furthermore, an organized effort in the state attacked the immigrant community, and cut social programs for poor families. Under this conservative and corrosive environment, a number of anti-immigrant initiatives arose in the state legislature, and budget cuts for

social services followed. These constant attacks on vulnerable communities in Arizona forced PCIC and AIN to become more reactive than proactive when it came to their organizing approach. There was less time and energy for building relationships because of the need to organize campaigns, and to mobilize people against anti-immigrant initiatives.

The move in the United States towards a more conservative stand on immigration and social issues in general was also felt inside some faith-based institutions. As a result, conservative congregations grew in Arizona, while the progressive arm of the church kept shrinking. In addition, the religious right took a much more proactive stance against activist groups, and pro-immigrant groups like PCIC and AIN. For example, in the middle of fighting against anti-immigrant initiatives in 2004, a powerful religious leader in Phoenix sent a letter to all its congregation representatives telling them that AIN could only organize inside its churches if they also advocated for the pro-life and anti-gay marriage agendas. Otherwise, they should be denied access to its leaders.

This conservative ideology combined with a culture of fear polarized the community. As a result of this ideological shift, the governor could not advocate and fight for social programs as she had done in past years. She had been fighting to maintain level funding for social programs, but that became increasingly more difficult for her to do. Since the November 2004 election, more than 50 anti-immigrant bills were introduced in the state legislature. The governor was able to veto most of them, but because of increasing political pressure and her own political aspirations, she was not able to stop all of them. One of the last anti-immigrant bills the governor

had to face was Proposition 300<sup>5</sup>. It passed in the November 2006 elections with more than 70 percent of the Arizona votes.

In addition, since then political campaigns have involved pumping money in to quick and massive electoral campaigns, expecting fast results. As an organizer told me,

There has been a shift in funding by the progressive political side. More campaigns are being funded, which bombard people with commercials. We also have quick electoral campaigns, in the hopes that people will vote. Because of this shift, less money is being used to fund efforts such as ours. We just want the quick fix. I want to research to what extent our organizing leads to people to vote during local and national elections. There is need to study the IAF organizing processes and the outcomes it generates. If we can find a correlation between our work and people voting, we can get more funding for our organization.

Funding for organizations like PCIC or AIN had become scarce, unless they could run effective voter registration campaigns. There was the added pressure for PCIC to produce numbers, to be able to quantify results. Because PCIC had lost power at the local level, voter registration campaigns seemed essential if PCIC hoped to influence politics in Tucson again. By the time I ended my two-year investigation, there was less

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<sup>5</sup> Proposition 300 says that adult education classes from the Arizona Department of Education can only be offered to individuals with lawful immigration status. In addition, only people with lawful immigration status are eligible for discounted “in-state” tuition at community colleges and state universities. Only people with lawful immigration status can receive tuition waivers, grants, scholarships or other financial assistance paid by state funds. It also says that only parents, guardians, and caretakers with lawful immigration status would be eligible for child care assistance from the Arizona Department of Economic Security (even if the children are U.S. Citizens). Two times a year, state agencies affected by Proposition 300 (adult education, DES, community colleges, etc.) need to report the number of people who were denied services due to inadequate immigration status. State agencies affected by Proposition 300 would have to implement this proposition with respect to all people, without regard to race, religion, gender, ethnicity or national origin.

time to organize core teams, to have one-on-ones, to organize trainings, and for planned reflection opportunities. There was much more pressure to mobilize leaders on voter registration drives, in order to react to the anti-immigrant initiatives, and to try to keep programs funded.

Changes inside PCIC developed too because of the formation of the Arizona Interfaith Network (AIN). In 2000, because of mounting pressure on poor families coming from the state legislature, an organizer suggested to the leadership of the five Arizona IAF sister organizations to form an umbrella organization that would address issues and policies at the state level. Once leaders from these organizations (Yuma Interfaith, East Valley Interfaith, Valley Interfaith Project, Flagstaff Interfaith, and PCIC) agreed, AIN was formed. This process was made official with a gathering of about 5,000 leaders from all over the State, in Phoenix. Because State issues had been central to the work PCIC since at least 2004, decisions that affected all IAF organizations in Arizona had been made at AIN meetings. This dramatically limited the decision-making capacity of leaders in Tucson. Local issues seemed to have been put on the back burner, while the AIN agenda remained central to the work of organizers and leaders in Tucson.

PCIC used to focus on organizing practices such as developing personal stories, reflection time, and individual meetings among others. PCIC leaders were deeply engaged and impacted by participating with PCIC. During my investigation, though, the organization moved more into a mobilizing (electoral politics) mode, sacrificing the core practices of the IAF's organizing model. Organizers had to rely on the training and experience of the more seasoned leaders to get things done. At the

same time, novice leaders experienced and organized culture inside PCIC that emphasized action after action, with little time for other aspects of the IAF's intended pedagogical approach. Larger structural factors enhanced this imbalance between action or mobilizing mode, and eroded other organizing practices such as storytelling, reflection, which were essential components in building a relational culture. Ultimately, these pressures discouraged critical reflection in relation to PCIC's own institutional practices. Whenever reflection did take place, it was largely instrumental in nature. The focus on the latter kind of reflection became an effective tool for PCIC organizers to quell internal dissent. I illustrate this phenomenon further in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE PEDAGOGICAL PARADOX OF PCIC

As I have described elsewhere, the purpose of my study is to explore how people experience learning inside an Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) organization, in this case the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC). The study involved exploring the pedagogical approach used by PCIC, as well as identifying, describing, and analyzing some key learning processes that take place in the IAF. Ultimately, I explored how the IAF contributes to Strong Democracy. In order to learn about these processes, I both interviewed PCIC leaders and organizers, and I observed meetings, workshops, and public actions for two years. The findings that I will discuss in this section are a result of first asking the participants in this research project what they had learned as leaders with PCIC. These findings were then corroborated with further conversations and observations of meetings, workshops, and public actions. Central to my findings is a paradox in PCIC's pedagogy. This chapter describes the contested, complex, and messy nature of learning inside PCIC. It shows that leaders' and organizers' experiences in PCIC often reproduced ways of thinking and acting which supported the dominant cultural practices inside the organization, but simultaneously occurring transformative learning experiences produced recognitions enabled them to critique and challenge the exiting socio-economic and political order. Ultimately, in this chapter I attempt to describe the dynamics of informal learning inside PCIC.

This chapter will bring to the forefront the contradiction between PCIC leaders' and organizers' espoused theory and what actually happens in their organizational practice. This contradiction is particularly evident in the nexus between



PCIC's storytelling pedagogy and the practice of reflection inside the organization. Although there is a reciprocal and recursive relationship between storytelling and reflection inside PCIC, the prescriptive nature of PCIC's pedagogy disallows critical reflection in relation to its own institutional practices. While promoting critical reflection at the individual and community levels inside PCIC has true transformational potential, in practice it has not fulfilled its potential for effecting critical, collective change. In order to illustrate this incongruent dynamic, first I look at the development and uses of personal and political or collective stories inside PCIC. I also describe PCIC's relational meeting pedagogy. I continue by exploring how reflection is practiced and experienced inside PCIC and focus particularly on the organization's training approaches and decision-making processes as sites where this contested and complex dynamic occurs.

### **The Craft of Storytelling**

I'd been working with this woman Julia from a church, for a while, and just hadn't gotten to do a one-on-one with her. So we go to meet with her, Jack went with me, and she's got this teeny tiny trailer, and actually she lives in a trailer park with some other leaders, who also have teeny tiny trailers. So we go into this place and, there are two places to sit and there's three of us. First of all, the fact that they have us in their home, and she tells this story about how she had to leave Mexico because she was being abused by her husband and she was ready to kill him. She almost killed him, so she had to leave. Some of her kids came, and some didn't. Never in a million years would I have known that story looking at this woman. She's pretty quiet although she's been blossoming and developing a public persona. In fact that's just kind of weird, for this white woman to come into her home, and for her to be telling me those things. The fact that she would be open enough and that I could create whatever kind of environment that would allow her to do that is... Patty calls it holy work, and at moments like that, that was my holy moment. [She opened up] because she trusted me and I had been around her enough, and I think she understood why we were having this meeting, and that I was going to tell her something too about my own pain and history.

In my research of PCIC I found that the practice of telling and developing personal and collective stories is vital to the pedagogy and learning that takes place for PCIC leaders and organizers. I first arrived at this conclusion by asking PCIC leaders what they had learned while participating with PCIC. Although this question elicited a variety of responses, in this section I look at the categories that look at storytelling practices inside the organization. PCIC leaders and organizers see storytelling as the most radical pedagogical tool used by the IAF and vital in preparing them for effective participation in public life. The following excerpts from interviews illustrate why storytelling matters inside PCIC.

There was a recognition that it was okay to have a story, and that it was okay to talk about things. There was a recognition that, “yeah, this wasn’t right.”

We learn to understand where we come from, and why we get angry about why the people keep suffering. The system is what angers me, that there is a system out there that we have got to change in order for these families to receive fair treatment and be able to treat them with dignity.

As a leader, I kept really looking for my story, and it was a struggle. I felt like, well, people with the good stories are the Hispanics on the Southside. What do we white women have to say? I really had to think about my own story.

As we can ascertain from these excerpts the development of personal stories was central to their learning and development as leaders inside PCIC. Quite a few of the responses also described the development of a collective story, described also as the political storyline, as vital to the learning that takes place inside the organization. The following excerpts capture some of the components of this collective story.

It is a way we can learn more about power in the community, the State, and the Nation. It’s a place where we can discover new ways of thinking about power and about who we are and what we are capable of. IAF, AIN, PCIC analyze why things happen. Who has power currently? Why things are happening the

way they are, and where are the pressure points where we can begin to have influence, and how relationships help it all connect.

What I saw was a study of history. I loved the study of history, I loved the study of politics; I loved the analysis of what was happening.

PCIC allowed me to see structures in place here in our own community that really were not fair, that affected disproportionately people from low socio-economic backgrounds, and so part of the work was research actions, learning about different things.

These responses illustrate the importance of understanding the socio-political context. My investigation also showed that there is a reciprocal relationship between the development of personal and collective stories. Furthermore, the development of these stories often moves back and forth from reproducing the existing order to critiquing it and challenging it. This complex and contested process leads to the formation of an alternative story. In other words, this alternative story is informed by people's personal stories, by the integration stories that make up the collective stories, by group dynamics, by people's participation in social action, by the socio-cultural context, and by the more systematic learning opportunities (workshops, three and ten-day trainings) provided, and above all, by leaders' and organizers' ability to integrate all of these occurring phenomena into the larger narrative/storyline. The following excerpts illustrate this point effectively.

Stories are the meat for individual and collective reflection inside the organization. These stories are the lenses that we use to develop political judgment, to make decisions what actions to take on.

I remember we met at a church, is it Saint Marks? At Saint Cyril's too; sometimes we would meet over there. We might have a reading from Brueggemann, or it might be a political reading; it would be different kinds of

readings, and of course everybody, you would read it or you would have read it, by the time you came to the meeting. You would begin by talking about, what this meeting meant to you personally. What questions did you have? What challenged you in those readings? And always the drive to tell a story, and that was something I wasn't used to, to tell a story, to be personal not just analytical. It was a very hard thing for me to do. I'd never read that way before. Nobody had asked me how this connects to your personal story about economic development or about social justice, or whatever it is. This thing of beginning to form a personal story was something new and uncomfortable for me, putting myself out there, but important. To see people at different levels, different expertise, expertise isn't the right word, but different levels, willingness to be vulnerable, to share their experiences with others.

Next, I explore leaders' understanding of how personal and collective stories are developed.

### **The Development of Personal Stories**

One of the things that almost all of the 25 people I interviewed said was that they had seldom thought about their stories before becoming leaders with PCIC. It was in interaction with others that they began to think about their own stories. The following excerpt from interviews with two PCIC leaders further illustrates this point.

I worked as the coordinator for a domestic violence shelter for women and children in Tucson. I saw women and children coming and going, and nothing ever change for them. In my previous job I saw also the same thing happening with sexual assault victims. Right before I became the coordinator for the shelters, I went in and asked for a job at the Tucson Mall. They were interviewing about fourteen people. I was the only one who was Hispanic, and the only one with a master's level education. I also had some previous experience as a cashier. They gave the job to seven of those people as cashiers and folding clothes. I was the only one that was offered the job of cleaning floors, and bathrooms, of scraping gum off the floors. I got fewer hours, and got paid less. I quit after two days at work. I complained to the manager but nothing happened, that's all I could do. After becoming a leader and an organizer with PCIC and AIN, I began thinking, maybe there is something else I could have done. I've learned that you don't have to be quiet when something happens to you or to your family; that there is a time and a place where you can put the anger that you have, and aim it towards something. Pretty much, do

the right thing with that anger. Before I was involved with PCIC and AIN I had never reflected on the meaning of that experience.

I've been a leader with PCIC for about five years. I was born in Mexico City in 67 and my family was never involved in the community. My grandmother would vote but I was never interested in that. I hated politics when I was in high school. When I arrived in the US, my first job was cleaning houses. I was used to a different kind of life, I felt frustrated and angry because I was cleaning houses and cleaning toilets. I was also having problems with my husband. I would say this is not happening to me...I felt very frustrated, in Mexico I worked as an office manager. My life was different back home. I began to learn English and felt that little by little I became part of this society. I started studying English in 1997 and computers. I eventually was hired to oversee the computer lab and at around that time I met an organizer with PCIC. He said he wanted to have a conversation with me and reluctantly I accepted. I don't remember ever someone asking to meet with me just to talk. I thought it was strange. When we met, he told me a little bit about PCIC and what they do, and that they were interested in my story. He told me stories were important, but I did not understand why. I'm just an immigrant learning English trying to better my life. What kind of a story is that? He asked me if I could tell the story of why Adult Education was important to me and my community, at an award ceremony for Raul Grijalva. After telling my story that time I realized that my story was important. Once I started telling it I realized that many others were in my situation, I realized that stories are important and that I had the responsibility to tell it and get other people to realize that their immigrant stories are important as well. I did not know I was someone that could take risks. I had never used my story as a tool to connect with others. I learned my story by telling it in one-on-ones, by repeating it, changing it depending on the type of training or meeting. I've also learned by listening to other people's stories. How are their stories similar to mine, how we all came to this country and suffered similarly.

Before participating as leaders with PCIC these two leaders did not understand that their experience could be conveyed through storytelling, their voices did not matter. Their stories convey their frustration and pain, but no vehicle to alleviate those emotions. As learners inside PCIC they got involved in a process of looking at their lives, identifying injustice through stories, feeling angry about it, but channeling that anger towards a vision of hope. The stories of PCIC leaders are filled with emotional transitions. They first convey a feeling of pain and deep loss. They continue with a

sense of humiliation, followed by a feeling of anger and injustice. These emotions lead the storyteller to feel a sense of recognition and acceptance. The stories then culminate with feelings of hope and a sense of agency. I explore this process further, next.

These stories, as many others I heard, also express a sense of frustration with the current state of things in society. In the first story, the narrator tells us of how things are always the same for the children and mothers he works with. He shows us his frustration with society when he says,

I was the only one who was Hispanic, the only one with a Master's education, and I also had some previous experience as a cashier. They gave the job to seven of those people as cashiers and folding clothes. I was the only one that got the job of cleaning floors, and bathrooms, taking the gum out of the streets. I got fewer hours, and got paid less.

The second narrator critiques society when she says,

When I arrived in the US my first job was cleaning houses. I was used to a different kind of life, I felt frustrated and angry because I was cleaning houses and cleaning toilets. I was also having problems with my husband. I would say this is not happening to me...I felt very frustrated, in Mexico I worked as an office manager. My life was different back home.

Both stories tell us that there is something wrong with a society that does not protect mothers, children, or immigrants. A strong critique of culture is imbedded in these stories and seems to be a central component of PCIC's pedagogy.

In addition, in both stories the storyteller argues for the wellbeing of a community not just their own. The first narrator tells us he would like the conditions of abused women and children to change. The second one wants conditions to improve for immigrants and students. Both stories speak about the common good, about justice for all. These ideas came out in many PCIC leaders' stories. Not only are people's

stories critical of societal injustice, they also speak about their commitment to the well-being of all.

In both cases, we also learn that before participating with PCIC, the narrators had never taken time to remember, to articulate, and to voice their stories. They had never had a chance to integrate different aspects of their stories. They had never had a chance to tell their stories to others. The process of telling these stories to others, and listening to other people's stories, enhances their capacity to recreate their own story, to retell it more effectively, and to choose which aspects of it to tell. Story integration is a valued skill for PCIC leaders and organizers. As the second narrator states:

I learned my story by telling it in one-on-ones, by repeating it, changing it depending on the type of training or meeting. I've also learned by listening to other people's stories. How are their stories similar to mine, how we all came to this country and suffered similarly.

Both narrators also make the point that their stories were shaped when they told them and retold them in interaction. When I asked leaders and organizers how they learned to tell their stories, they said it was through interaction with others that they learned to tell a new story about themselves. If PCIC leaders did not have a community of storytellers, their stories would have never been told. When these two leaders told me their stories, PCIC had been fighting against anti-immigrant initiatives introduced at the state legislature, as well as efforts in the state to cut social services. These leaders' stories speak about these issues. After observing PCIC meetings, workshops, public actions, and interviewing leaders and organizers, it became evident that larger community stories, or the political context, inform and shape personal stories. Again, there is a reciprocal relationship between the personal and collective

stories. These two excerpts show that the history, the political context, the setting where the story is told, and the people involved in this process are central to what a personal story looks like. At the same time, personal stories inform the collective or political storyline as we will illustrate later in this chapter.

One important characteristic about these stories is that there is a clear sense of hope in both of them. The first narrator says,

After becoming a leader, I began thinking, maybe there something else I could have done. I've learned that you don't have to be quiet when something happens to you or to your family. That there is a time and a place where you can put that anger that you have, and aim it towards something.

The second leader tells us,

Once I started telling it I realized that many others were in my situation, I realized that stories are important and that I had a responsibility to tell it, and get other people to realize that their immigrant stories are important as well. It was now my moral responsibility, that why I would take those risks

Listening and telling stories like these inspired leaders inside PCIC. That is precisely what moved leaders into action. By telling these stories, leaders translated their values and emotions into action. When these stories evoked feelings of anger, frustration, and solidarity they led to action. Reflecting on anger through stories was the moral source that motivated participation in action. The following excerpts look at anger and storytelling further:

When I first started organizing, or I went to training, we talked about anger. Anger is a Norse word that means something you have lost. If you don't have anger, is there something that drives you? So the question I asked about anger and this is, "Can you teach anger? So you're telling me that if somebody doesn't have anger they can't organize or they can't be a leader?"... Let me tell you a story that connects to this idea. While I was living in the barrio my



family thought, “Well, maybe we needed to get out of the barrio and go into a middle class neighborhood”. When we went from the barrio to a middle class neighborhood, we immediately were being treated differently. We were accused of having lice, we were accused of not bathing, and that was real difficult. So we tried to go back, we tried to go back to the barrio, and because we lived in a different neighborhood we weren’t allowed to go back. I had to go to that white school, and so that really had helped shape me, because I was in this place where I wasn’t being welcomed. I recall that early story about feeling that humiliation...People don’t understand what other people are going through, and unless we connect to story, unless we connect to people’s anger, and then think about what that is doing, we won’t be able to act...To me it’s this anger piece, but I also think my anger has changed, and the anger has changed based on who I’m in relationship with. As an organizer my job is not to stay in the same place all the time. So my anger has changed because I’ve connected with other people’s anger and other people’s story, and reflected with other people about where they are. It’s almost like wearing somebody else’s shoes...

Anger is a way to move people to action. But that you have to convert anger, you’re not looking for hot anger. You’re not looking for that kind of self-destructive anger, but that people are angry usually at an injustice, angry at something that’s happening to other people in their circle as opposed to, you know, them personally, although it could be. And so I think that anger is one of the qualities of a leader, but I don’t view it as an absolute necessity, because I think operating out of a passion that comes out of your faith tradition can be just as potent, as what most people would think of as anger.

It was interesting to see that when it came to reflecting on what motivated people into action inside PCIC, women were less convinced that anger was the main motivator of people. The following excerpts from a female leader and a female organizer further illustrates this phenomenon.

They [organizers] are too aggressive. Many of us are not used to dealing with that kind of aggression. A lot of people I know inside PCIC have a problem with anger. There was some tension around that at three-day training. Even people born in the US have a problem with this concept, but since they [the organizers] are used to dealing with politicians, I guess it has to be done that way. You know, we are not always dealing with politicians. We deal with adult education students, folks from churches and I know there is a huge cultural clash. PCIC has to learn to be kinder to people. There are a lot of people out there who are not used to dealing with PCIC’s aggressive and assertive ways. I

used to have a really hard time with it, but I guess I've gotten used to it, but there are a lot of great people who decide to leave PCIC because they feel so bad.

Organizers are supposed to do individual meetings. My best days have individual meetings in them; those are the best days. I think I've learned how to do them better. I don't think anger is at the top of the list when it comes to leadership qualities. Curiosity for me is really important; how do people learn to be curious? Can we teach that...Who is this person, and why are they here? What do they care about? For goodness sakes, why are they doing what they are doing? I was doing one-three day training in Arizona a few years ago, and I was leading this one-on-one practice session, and you there were eight people in the room. And I said to this woman from Phoenix, "Aren't you curious about her?" because it was a deadly individual meeting. She looks at me and says, "No, not really." First of all that's so humiliating; I don't know, I think that's kind of mean. How could you not be curious about people?

Both excerpts emphasize the importance of creating a nurturing, kind, respectful, and secure environment for the leaders. It appeared to me that this nurturing and less aggressive approach to organizing resonated more with some of women and people of color inside the organization. The following excerpt illustrates the more aggressive tone and rhetoric used by some of the male leaders and organizers.

IAF agitates you to understand where you come from and why you get angry...What makes me angry? You learn to understand that the system is what angers me, that there is a system out there that we have got to change in order for these families to receive fair treatment and be able to treat them with dignity. That is the kind of thing that I believe angers me, and that is what I think the work of an organizer is, to train the leader to be able to determine what is that anger they have, where are you going to take that anger and be able to develop that leadership potential that is in that individual by way of challenging one. You are angry, but what are you going to do about it? Are you willing to do something about it?

If the organizer doesn't have a good relationship and isn't afraid to take them [leaders] on, and I mean coming in hard, not afraid to have this individual feel offended; if that leader gets offended, they shouldn't, they don't understand critique. An organizer has to be able to critique anybody, and if a leader understands that, should be able to take whatever critique comes in from the organizer, and the organizer needs to understand too when that leader comes back at that organizer. For me, an organizer that understands that, and doesn't

develop that leadership by taking someone on, in other words is soft, that is not an organizer. There have been organizations like that that I've known in Texas and Arizona, that I see those organizers that are organizers, and those that want to be organizers but don't know how to go beyond that.

**Storytelling in action: the art of relational meetings.** Most of the leaders and organizers that I interviewed pointed at the relational meeting (one-on-one) trainings offered by PCIC as rich opportunities to deepen their understanding of why storytelling matters, and how to effectively use them in public life. The following is an account of one of the relational meeting trainings that I observed during my investigation.

At this particular workshop the organizer began by saying,

The relational meeting is the tool we use to establish public relationships. It's about people's stories, not social commentary. It requires that we listen more than talk. Today is about finding commonality, about connecting around our values. It is about listening more than talking. It's an art not a science. We learn how to do one-on-ones with practice, just like learning how to play a musical instrument. Today you are going to learn the how-to of conducting a one-on-one, and you'll acquire a sensibility about this art form

Most of this training was devoted to doing/performing the individual meetings. The organizer began the training by first modeling the relational meeting with one of the participants. She told them she would stop the interaction at different points during the exchange to get feedback about the quality and depth and directions of stories, the types of questions that were being asked, as well as strategies for improving the overall interaction. The following is a description of an individual meeting between two of the workshops participants.

The meeting began with the two participants greeting each other by shaking hands. Then Max asked John to tell him a little bit about himself. John began to tell his story. He said,

I grew up in Mexico in a very poor community. Because my community was so poor, and my family could not survive anymore, I had to try my luck in the US. So one day --I was fifteen years old-- I crossed the border to the US. My father was already living in the US so I moved in with him.

At this point Max interrupts and asks John how he felt having left his family. John replied, “Although my father was here, I felt alone. I was very sad. I was exploited at work, and discriminated against because I am Mexican.” Then Max asked, “Did this experience make you feel angry?” John's face changed at this point. His expression became more intense, more agitated. In a more animated tone he responded, “Of course I was angry. I was a child. I was alone, and treated like a second-class citizen. I had no support from my siblings or mother like I did in Mexico.” At this point Max interrupted John and said,

John, I can relate to your experience. I am an immigrant myself. My family also went through challenging times back home. My father was bedridden because of brain cancer. My mother, an immigrant herself, had to take care of four children, work long hours to make ends meet, and take care of a sick husband. I remember sometimes she would have to ask other relatives for money so we could have dinner that day.

Here John asked Max how this made him feel. Max seemed close to tears. Half choking he said, “It makes me really angry those children today, that parents today have to go through similar experiences. It makes me angry that the immigrant experience in this country is filled with exploitation and injustice.” John asked, “Is that the reason why you are here today?” Max responded, “Yes. I want to fight so that

things change for immigrants.” Max asked John, “How about you?” “Well, after working my way up to bank manager, I have decided to quit my job and become an organizer.” “Why?” asked Max. “Because I’m tired of working for a few that get wealthy, while immigrants like myself are being exploited and suffer every day. It is unjust. That’s why I want to organize.” At this point the trainer ended the one-on-one session.

When the meeting ended there was complete silence in the room. One could hear some of the participants crying, others looking puzzled. As a participant myself, I felt a knot in my throat, and a rush of energy. We all were filled with many emotions. There were expressions of anger, empathy, and passion. Participants said they could relate the others’ stories to their own. Max and John were not sad, but rather became emotional because of the power of the experience. After the silence, everyone reflected on the meaning of what had just happened. Max and John had helped each other reconnect with their past, and to articulate it by telling their stories. A new relationship had been formed as a result, one based not on their private lives, but on their public stories of pain and injustice.

The relational meeting broke down some of the barriers and assumptions the participants had about each other. Although Max and John were both immigrants, they had very different backgrounds. They came from different parts of Latin America, one came from an urban and the other one from a rural setting. One had a graduate education and the other had made his way up in his field by starting at the very bottom, with very little formal training. One was fair skinned and would have easily passed as a Caucasian. For twenty minutes they focused on each other’s stories and

listened to each other. One of them said to me, “it was as if no one else was in the room observing our interaction. I was so interested and connected to John’s story that I forgot about being nervous and apprehensive about sharing my story in public.” The following excerpt from an interview with a PCIC organizer illustrates this phenomenon further:

I think story is important, because if I tell you my story, and then you tell me your story then we will be able to connect... If there’s no connection, and I guess from my own experience, then you begin stereotyping. I think for people to be in relationship, to be connected, you can’t make assumptions about people, especially because we want to have a really diverse organization. Our strength is our diversity. Otherwise people stand in little safety zones....So, I do think that story connects people and eliminates stereotypes.

Storytelling and story development inside PCIC take place mostly while people participate in social action, but there is also a systematic pedagogy used to support this process. The relational meeting training gives people clarity and a deeper experience and understanding of this art form. It is important to point out here that novice storytellers are not able to articulate their stories as effectively as experienced leaders much less like the organizers. I also noticed that, although storytelling can break stereotypes and give people a deeper understanding of experience inside PCIC, until leaders develop a certain mastery of the art, they attracted less interest from their peers.

The cycle of relational organizing continues with leaders going back to their communities and having as many relational meetings as possible, coming back to PCIC gatherings to reflect and refine their stories and their relational skills. This process starts all over with relational meeting trainings. Relational organizing sparks

people's curiosity, it allows them to process their frustration and anger publicly, and allows them to envision a personal and community vision. By participating in relational and house meetings and participating in planned reflection opportunities leaders deepen their understanding of the learning they are experiencing. A PCIC leader would not be able to engage in effective public action without learning how to build relationships and connect with people first. Storytelling also reconnected leaders with core institutional and personal values (justice, relationships, anger, and love) and this process motivated and re-committed them to the long-term organizing efforts of the organization.

An important outcome of effective storytelling and relationship building inside PCIC is the formation of institutional core teams. The core team is the engine that drives institutional change. Strong and lasting relationships will only occur if people connect at a deeper level. Sharing stories enhances people's ability to listen to each other, creates empathy and encourages a vision for the common good, and in the process builds strong leadership teams. PCIC organizers would often say, "Leaders will only be effective if they can connect with others around their stories." "Leaders will only be able to form stable and lasting core teams through sharing their stories and reflecting on them."

The process of having relational and house meetings informed PCIC leaders about what was happening in people's lives. The stories that people told represented the issues that needed to be addressed in order to improve people's lives. The more relational a leader was, the more she or he would learn about the hardships people

were facing. Once enough information had been gathered through relational and house meetings, an action agenda was crafted. In order to develop effective strategies for action, research actions were organized. Through research actions, teams of leaders gathered vital information and deepened their understanding of those issues. The following are some of the questions they would ask: Who are the stakeholders? Who makes decisions around the issue? Who supports it and who is against it? What are the relevant regulations or policies? Who else needs to be part of this conversation? Who should we meet with to further understanding of the issues (elected officials, community leaders, academics)? Research actions provided leaders with an opportunity to have a deeper understanding of issues, provided leaders the skills to conduct participatory research, and above all, they were valuable leadership development opportunities. During my two-year observation research actions were organized to learn about immigration issues, living wages, job training, afterschool opportunities for youth, healthcare for the elderly, institutional power analyses, and to gather information about local leaders, among others.

### **Crafting the Political Storyline**

As I expressed before, during my two years working with PCIC, when I asked people what they learned with PCIC, they would often say, “I have learned about the politics in Tucson”; “I know how power really works”; “I can see structures of injustice I could not see before”; “I’ve learned about local and State issues.” There were common elements in what all these leaders were telling me. People felt that understanding the political context was a central to PCIC’s pedagogical approach.



Organizers have an explicit pedagogy that teaches the craft of creating an alternative construction of reality, an alternative story that can challenge the dominant socio-cultural constructs. Organizers often refer to it as a political storyline. Just like with personal stories, the development of a political storyline is a complex and contested process, one that at times may reproduce the status quo while simultaneously producing experiences that challenge the existing order. The process of telling and retelling this new story gives leaders hope, leads to action, and reenergizes the organizational leadership. The following is an account of how these processes happen.

When I first began my research with PCIC, I had no idea what was happening with the politics of Tucson and the State of Arizona, what the main issues were, and what PCIC's agenda was. One of the organizers suggested I attend the monthly Arizona Interfaith Network (AIN) staff meetings, either in Casa Grande or Phoenix, Arizona, in order to learn about what was going on.

The first meeting I attended took place at a church in downtown Phoenix. Organizers and leaders from across the state participated in the meeting. When we arrived at the church, there were about ten Arizona and New Mexico organizers and five leaders. The organizers welcomed me warmly. Most of the group was the same as five years ago, when I was a leader with PCIC. Organizers joked with each other before the meeting started; it was a very relaxed environment. We gathered in a small room at the church. Once the meeting began things changed; attention shifted to one of the organizers, whom I'll refer to as Steve. The laughs and smiles dissipated. There was complete silence in the room. Steve began by framing the agenda for the day. He said,

Today we are going to talk about the Faithful Citizenship Campaign<sup>6</sup>, the Protect Arizona Now (PAN)<sup>7</sup> initiative, a workshop on how to develop and conduct effective trainings, and rounds with Ernesto Cortes<sup>8</sup>, and finally a discussion of the Hauerwas chapters.

Notice here the breadth of activities taking place for the day. There was a combination of learning about the political environment in the state, issues of immigration, reflecting on the organizing work of each participant, and finally reflecting and discussing a reading. I learned through my observations that the political storyline is learned by having conversations about a variety of issues and in a variety of settings. By focusing on so many things at the same time, PCIC leaders and organizers develop political strategies, share leaders' stories, tell stories of their organizing work, talk about new allies, and new relationships, among many other things. An incredible amount of information is exchanged and then crafted into a political storyline that is then taught to leaders at the local level. This political storyline is told and retold at the local level where it goes through further changes. This is an ever occurring phenomenon. Through this complex process of crafting this political storyline people begin to uncover a new story. They identify problems with the dominant story, and develop an alternative community vision. Although learning about the political storyline is a collective endeavor, central to the development of this storyline is the

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<sup>6</sup> Faithful Citizenship was a campaign to register as many people as possible to vote in the upcoming November elections, and a strategy used increasingly by AIN and PCIC.

<sup>7</sup> The Protect Arizona Now Initiative (PAN) was a newly formed group in Arizona that planned on introducing legislation and ballot proposals in the November 2, 2004 elections, in order to protect taxpayers from costs incurred by the State from increasing numbers of immigrants using social services. The initiative would require all immigrants to show proof of their legal status in order to receive any kind of public benefit or service. According to the supporters of this initiative, "illegals" were draining our State of its resources, and were a burden to law obeying taxpayers of the State. When this initiative was introduced in Arizona, it originally received the support of more than 80 percent of Arizonans, partly because it was framed as a tax and economics issue, when in fact the national organizations funding the initiative have been tied to white supremacist and racist groups (Source PCIC conversations and trainings, newspaper articles, online articles)

<sup>8</sup> Ernesto "Ernie" Cortes is the Director of the Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation Organization.

role of the lead organizers. As I continue to describe this first meeting I attended, we will get a better sense of the role of the organizer in crafting the political storyline.

As is common practice with PCIC and AIN, Steve asked everyone if they agreed with the agenda and we all responded it seemed okay. Then he asked everyone present to introduce herself or himself and share an organizing story before we continued with the meeting. Notice here the importance of individual stories, but for the purpose of this discussion, I will focus on the part of the meeting dealing with the Protect Arizona Now Initiative (PAN). Most of us have heard little or nothing about the PAN initiative. Steve asked one of the organizers to brief the rest of us on what AIN knows about the PAN initiative. He said,

In the beginning of 2004 we found out that a nationwide organization named Immigration Reform Federation (IRF) had contacted some conservative leaders in Arizona with the intention of organizing a drive to collect enough signatures in order to introduce an anti-immigrant proposition in the November 2004 elections. IRF has given 400,000 dollars to the PAN Coalition to jumpstart this campaign. Kathy McKee a well-known white supremacist is running the campaign. IRF is running a local campaign without being based in Arizona. The purpose for the funding is for PAN representatives, some of our friends in the legislature to introduce a bill in the November 2004 ballot.

Steve continued,

Do you know who T.J is? He is the guy behind IRF. He founded IRF in 1979. In the past, he has been involved with giving incentives for the sterilization of low-income women in the third world. Do you know about the Pioneer Fund? This is an organization that seeks to prove the genetic superiority of the white race, eugenics. Tanton is linked to them as well. This initiative is about population control.

It is important to point out that right away Steve is creating what IAF organizers call a public drama. Good public dramas begin with tension and often tension starts with identifying the villain in this case T.J. and Tanton. Steve often reminds PCIC leaders

that a story without tension and a set of defined characters kills people's energy. Then he does something that IAF organizers are very intentional about doing. He says, "We need to tell this story in a clean and crisp way. It is important for people to understand the politics." He reminds the participants that it is vital to develop the habit of storytelling. The rituals and practices that make up the IAF's pedagogy are as important as the stories themselves. As Steve once told me, an organizer or a leader needs "conceptual capacity, meaning you can put pieces together and think over time, and make decisions."

Steve then continued,

They want us to believe that "illegals" are a burden to the economy of the State, and that we need to protect our taxpayers. We have many retired folks in Arizona who are barely making it. They don't need to support the "illegals." They use our hospitals, we pay for their schooling, they take our jobs, they commit crimes, they may be terrorists crossing over from Mexico, and they don't even want to speak English or integrate to society. The "illegals" are a danger to our way of life, to the Protestant Ethics that we value so much.

If we look at the description I just provided, there are two main stories beginning to develop. First, the meeting participants learned about the dominant perception Arizonans have regarding immigrants. Here Steve is not only telling a story that is being fed to the majority of Arizonans as he suggested, but in doing so Steve is speaking about a profound social problem in the State of Arizona. He made the point that Arizona is a state where immigrants are treated as second-class citizens. A strong social critique is taking place. Second, the process of telling this story begins to discredit the dominant story. This is a story that discloses injustice and pain, one that is important to tell in order to motivate action. This alternative story talks about who is

really behind the PAN initiative; it uncovers the methods that are being used to manipulate people in the state. Most importantly, it reminded the organizers and leaders present about compassion, respect, and justice. In other words this story not only taught facts, it also reminded the meeting participants of some of PCIC's core cultural values. Steve was very intentional and strategic about creating tension by starting with the dominant story. Then he juxtaposed it with an alternative account of what was happening at the time, as the following excerpt shows.

We know that this is a small group of right-wing Republicans that want to polarize Arizonans and they are doing it very effectively. We know what the real story is. They are a bunch of racists that are afraid of people that don't look like them or think like them. They are using fear as a tactic. They are tied to white supremacist groups, but they are using the tax excuse to win. People in Arizona don't know this story. This is nothing new; they have been trying to do this for years. They have been attacking the most vulnerable sector of the community for years. Our economy depends on immigrant workers, look at the hotel and agriculture sectors, at the restaurant sectors. They would collapse without them. Our economy depends on immigrant workers. It is also part of our faith traditions to protect them. This will be major battle with the nativist right wing of the Republican Party.

What followed was yet another reminder of the importance of nurturing the habit of story integration. The habit of telling and retelling stories and reflecting on those stories, allowed PCIC leader to find a deeper understanding to their stories and in the process enriched the political storyline or collective story.

We need to remember the importance of learning this story well. We will need to provide a sense of what is right and wrong without using the race card. That is what the other side wants. We need to raise the moral dimension of the story without polarizing the state racially. We need to figure out how to tell this story well. We can tell it effectively if we have a good understanding of Arizona politics. We need to figure out who are all the players behind the PAN initiative.

Steve had a penetrating stare, an intense tone. In a loud voice he added:

The language of the PAN initiative gives the appearance that it would protect the taxpayers from getting their taxes spent on social service programs for undocumented immigrants. The groups that are behind this effort in Arizona come from the fringes of the Republican Party: the nativist position<sup>9</sup> and the anti-tax position<sup>10</sup>. The purpose of this ballot initiative is to polarize the community and it is clearly driven by anti-immigrant interests. It has nothing to do with taxes or the well-being or the State of Arizona.

He ended this sentence with an angry and passionate expression, and a loud voice.

There was full attention in the room and absolute silence. He continued,

The details of this initiative are unknown to most people in the State of Arizona, and for this reason by making it sound like purely a tax issue, it has about 80 percent of support among Arizona voters. It is essential for us to develop a storyline we can use to organize against the PAN initiative, and inform as many people as possible what the initiative is really about. In order to craft this story we need to understand Arizona politics and its main players. We need to learn how the PAN initiative was crafted and by whom. You need to learn what the impact of immigrants is on the state. Then we'll be able to figure out how to tell this story effectively in order to agitate our leaders. We all need to all learn more about Proposition 200<sup>11</sup>, inform our leaders about it, and come back to the next AIN leaders meeting and decide how to respond to the proposition. If this initiative passes it will be the end of any hope for a sensible immigration reform. This is about polarizing; it is about fear, and hate. What kind of community do we want our children to grow up in? This campaign is extremely important in case the PAN initiative makes it to the November ballot. We need to have at least 10,000 conversations for these

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<sup>9</sup> For PCIC leaders, Nativists are a group people in Arizona wishing to remove all people not born in Arizona from the State.

<sup>10</sup> It is a group of people who would like Arizonan's not to have to pay taxes.

<sup>11</sup> The PAN initiative was eventually put on the November 2004 ballot as Proposition 200. It required a person to submit evidence of United States citizenship when registering to vote. It required the county recorder to reject any voter registration that is not accompanied by proof of citizenship. It required voters to present photo identification with name and address or two other forms of identification with name and address before receiving a ballot at the polling place. It required state and local governments to verify the identity and eligibility of applicants for state and local public benefits that are not federally mandated. It required government employees to report violations of United States immigration law by applicants for public benefits. It made it a class two misdemeanor if a government employee failed to make the required report. It allowed for private lawsuits by any resident to enforce provisions relating to public benefits. It gave preference to these lawsuits over any other pending in court. Source: Arizona Interfaith Network, 2006

goals to be met. Once we all have a clear storyline, we should invest our time having one-on-ones, house meetings.

PCIC leaders would tell and retell, change, and add to this storyline for the next two years. After this first meeting I attended, the same day, there was a larger leader meeting, and organizers told the same original story. They asked leaders to go back to their organizations and retell it, and to think about what AIN should do about the PAN initiative. Organizers and leaders would meet and continue to build onto this storyline as a way to move the organization into action. Whenever the energy of the organization's leaders was low, the story would be told again with a different twist but with the same plot and actors. This story would be told at churches, schools, and most PCIC meetings in Tucson. In the process organizers collected the personal stories of people suffering from discrimination, of the struggles undocumented workers were going through, and stories about the benefits of having immigrants in the State, among many others. Leaders would organize research meetings with experts and politicians in order to learn more about the immigration debate in the State. All of these stories were added to the original story that Steve told. This first meeting was central to the development of this larger political storyline.

This study showed that the process of telling and retelling stories expands people's vision and self-interest. Leaders moved from the individual self-interest to a collective one, to the common good. The more they connected with this broader vision, the more they saw themselves in a role of supporting the development of other leaders. This was a process that involved feeling empathy by processing difficult and unjust experiences with others. This process helped leaders develop a sense of

commonality, a sense of mutuality, and of reciprocity. The ultimate goal of PCIC's pedagogy was for leaders to understand their self-interest, to develop and support a vision for the common good, and to invest in their personal growth and the development of other leaders. Storytelling can have a powerful motivating effect on PCIC leaders. The next section looks at how organizers used storytelling to energize and re-commit leaders to PCIC.

### **How Storytelling Re-energizes PCIC Leaders**

PCIC and AIN leaders and organizers have worked tirelessly to defeat Proposition 200<sup>12</sup>. It has been a week since the November 2<sup>nd</sup> elections and the passing of Proposition 200. People are tired, feel defeated, angry, ashamed to live in Arizona, and concerned about what will happen with the immigrant population in the state. How does this group continue fighting in favor of the immigrant community? How do organizers re-commit leaders to the organization? PCIC organizers are skillful at crafting stories that can become moral victories in times of low energy or defeat. At times the re-energizing and re-committing effect of storytelling also seemed to have a subordinating and sublimating effect on PCIC leaders. I describe this dynamic, next.

Organizers are skillful at creating the perception that a setback is only temporary or partial and promoting the belief that this episode was just part of the larger struggle. PCIC organizers use storytelling to, as they expressed, to “re-dignify leaders’ sense of loss.” This process, when done well, involved telling stories where people re-membered (became members of the PCIC community again), people were

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<sup>12</sup> Proposition 200 was the official name the PAN initiative was given for the November 2004 ballot. Fifty six percent of Arizonan's voted in favor of it, much lower than the eighty five percent support it originally had among voters.



en-couraged (regained courage), and were re-minded (reorganized ideas, and hopes). This process energized, motivated people for continued action. Next, I explore how this was done.

I begin by providing a few examples of how organizers have used storytelling to reenergize its members successfully. AIN organizers and key leaders gathered in Casa Grande Arizona to evaluate the work of organizing against Proposition 200. There are twelve leaders and organizers present at the meeting. Before any of them had time to express their frustration and anger after the defeat, Steve says,

This is an extraordinary organizing opportunity for us; we may have some strange allies in the State now, like some Republicans, and members of the business community. We also were able to convince voters to vote against Prop 200. It had 80 percent of support originally, and we were able to lower it to 56. It was because of our work that this happened. This was victory in many ways.

Steve's comments elicit the following responses:

What are we going to build that is lasting considering what the right wing is doing? We've got to be patient.

I don't like electioneering. I want to do what we do best. We organize; we develop relationships.

There is a hysterical nature about campaigns. It is driven by the fear of losing.

Our new leaders are being trained in mobilizing not organizing. We organize.

In conservative areas in Arizona you can see 45 people crammed into a living room trying to challenge prop 200. What does it really mean to win? I think for us this whole thing was a winner.

I am down because we lost at different levels. As a Catholic, I hate to be associated with losers and I lost. The single issue won and that's not me. Fear won, the single issue won. Unless you can't relate with the wickedness of others you won't recognize it. The conservatives have known about Proposition 200 for the last ten years. I feel concerned for Arizona. I don't want my child to grow up in a place like this. We should remember what Arizona used to be like in our churches.

Although people feel angry and upset, Steve sets the tone for a more hopeful evaluation of the work done. If we look at the comments made by the participants, we can see two main things happening. First, they try as Steve did, to interpret their work as a victory with comments like: “We need to be patient.” “We organize, we develop relationships.” “Our new leaders are being trained in mobilizing not organizing. We organize.” “I think for us this whole thing was a winner.” “We should remember what Arizona used to be like in our churches.” Not only are people trying to distance themselves from the losing side, they are also looking at the future with a sense of hope, a sense that things cannot remain the same. The injustice could not prevail. These sentiments are enhanced further with what happens next in the meeting. Steve says,

We could have not fought this fight, but we had no choice, we could not betray our constituency. When Moses was asked by God to free the people of Israel from captivity, he had no choice. He was the only one who could do it. We had no choice just like Moses; it was our moral responsibility to do it. We fought for the people we had always fought for. We simply had no choice. We need to organize a leaders meeting around Proposition 200. What should this meeting be about? It should be about stories, one-on-ones, the story of what it means to win, and we won. So, we could start with individual meetings, a frame, four or five stories of the campaign, the consequences of it, fear and more injustice, and propose more education, more institutes on proposition 200 and our rights. People need to hear this story.

This story became a central motivating and healing story for the AIN organizations, for its leaders, for the immigrant community. It was healing because it connected people with their core values and emotions, and this is what has kept them fighting against the anti-immigrant movement in Arizona. Not only is this story healing and

empowering, but most interestingly, because it appeals to people's values and commitment to the organization, it got the participants in this gathering to support the choices the organizers had to make. The Moses story became a tool for justifying the choices that were made, but it also justified internal decision-making processes.

Steve was very intentional about choosing the Moses story. The Moses story connected most of the participants to their faith traditions, and ultimately, respect for the wisdom of the "religious leader," in this case the organizer. The content of the story, Steve's tone, energy, and delivery had an acquiescing effect on the participants. Guilt drove leaders to acquiesce and to re-commit to the organization. While storytelling has a promising transformative potential inside PCIC, it can also have a silencing effect due to PCIC's lack of critical reflection in relation to its own institutional practices. The following section focuses on the practice of reflection inside PCIC, and further illustrates these inconsistencies.

### **Reflection Inside PCIC**

When I first started participating with the Pima County Interfaith Council (PCIC) in 2004, I would constantly hear leaders and organizers use the word reflection. "We need to do more reflection." "We need to find time for reflection." "We are about reflection and action." When organizers conduct trainings, they often said, "to reflect is to bend backwards, to see the world from a different perspective." "We develop as leaders when we reflect about action." During my two years of research with PCIC leaders' primary request of organizers was more time for reflection. These requests would intensify during times of frantic action inside PCIC. Leaders and organizers alike understood the importance of reflection to deepen their

understanding of action and to reenergize them. As with storytelling these practices happen in a complex and contested arena. In this section I explore how leaders learn in action as well as look at what leaders and organizers mean by reflection. I also look at the dynamics between action and reflection to further illustrate the contested nature of learning inside PCIC.

### **Learning in Action**

If you went to a PCIC three-day or ten-day training, or if you attended a PCIC leaders meeting, chances are you would hear what an organizer told me: “Leaders learn how to organize by participating in action.” Organizers always reminded leaders that the only way to learn how to do a relational meeting, or to effectively facilitate a meeting, was by doing it. During my two-year observation of PCIC, organizers were constantly challenging leaders to lead public meetings, to run house meetings, to meet with elected officials, to come to meeting with business leaders, to meet with community members and learn about their concerns and hopes so they can learn the craft of organizing. The following excerpt from an interview with a PCIC leader illustrates this process:

My development as a leader was huge, because I had never been able to be a public person. I had never done public speaking or anything like that. I think all the skills that I learned about dealing with small groups, leading groups, how you draw people out...I think I learned all of that pretty much by doing it. At the time Steve was there, so he'd pull you up and say, “You are going to lead this meeting,” and coach you along the way.

Most of the leaders I interviewed highlighted the importance of a mentor or coach who encouraged them to take risks and participate, and gave them feedback as the previous excerpt illustrates. PCIC leaders also conveyed the vast set of skills that people

learned when they took a leading role organizing public actions as the ensuing excerpt conveys:

I think that with IAF, AIN, PCIC we learn to analyze why things happen, who has power currently, why things are happening the way they are, and where are the pressure points where we can begin to have influence, and how relationships help it all connect. I think in the general public, people don't know those things, it's not something taught in public schools, or something that you learn in college. You have to learn it elsewhere. You have to learn it in public life, as experiences in public life, on how to engage. PCIC is the only organization that I know of that actively teaches about power and relationships, and how we can pull together to have power through our relationships. You learn about power allowing people to see interactions with public officials, and actually get to be part of that, about an actual opportunity to engage publicly with public officials, or with each other, or through some other kind of action.

During my study I learned that a vital aspect of PCIC's pedagogy involves leaders understanding power and how it affects people's participation in public life.

Organizers defined power as the ability to act. They taught leaders that power can be exercised in a top-down and unilateral manner. Unilateral power aimed at controlling people leads to exploitation and reproduces the oppressive socio-economic and political structures in society. Unilateral power is used to force the oppressed to give their consent to the more powerful groups in society. For power not to oppress and corrupt it has to be closely tied to love. I also learned that relational power-- when people build collective power by having face-to-face interactions - can challenge those who benefit from unilateral uses of power. Relational power is built through relational meetings and storytelling. The most important goal for organizers is for leaders to understand and build relational power in order to create powerful organizations. The previous excerpt also captures PCIC's leaders' practical understanding of how power operated. Leaders needed to have an understanding of who the players were, how

much power they held, what they cared about, and what relationships mattered to them. This shows the integral role of reflection in informing action inside PCIC. Once all of these issues had been discussed, leaders and organizers could develop a strategy for action. Negotiating the strategy was also an important learning experience for leaders as the following description shows:

I know I learned a lot through finding myself in situations where I wasn't totally comfortable...I learned so much from them. I was really nervous as we started planning actions. The planning process was so frustrating, so long, and so laborious. Just all the details that had to go into bringing hundreds of people into one place, and having them have place to sit, and having them be engaged on what was going on the stage. Having the sound, and the posters, and we were going to have this parade of new citizens with mariachis. We were going to have them escort the politicians in. How to get the politicians there and having them be ready for the questions we were going to ask them in front of the people. How are we going to give them a chance to speak but, but not too much time? Because, you know, you give a politician the microphone and they could go on and on forever. How are we going to arrange that? We practiced enough, but we could have practiced a lot more. Even doing the planning of one specific event, organizing is all reorganizing. People were coming and going during that planning process even. For one event people are coming and going. It's really hard; we practiced as much as we possibly could. I think we negotiated a lot of items, and I had to accept what I thought were unrealistic expectations. But I had to stand my ground on some things that I wanted for sure. I can't remember what, but I just remember there being a lot of pushing and pulling. Negotiating of what are we going to try to accomplish with this one single event. It was the most demanding period of time in my life practically. There were so many evening meetings of extra time planning, and talking and re-planning. Afterwards I felt totally exulted. I was just so high because I had done it. Also it was one of those things that was such a huge accomplishment, and it was such a huge task, and it was such a big challenge, I mean, I cried afterwards. I was so wrecked, but in a good way sort of.

The combination of personal and collective story development, socio-cultural and political analysis, strategy development, and performance during the event had a powerful impact on the narrator. Furthermore, through this process of organizing public actions, PCIC leaders developed what IAF organizers call political judgment. I illustrate this phenomenon further with the following example:

PCIC organizers believed that it is in action that leaders develop political judgment. I observed a great example of this phenomenon at one of the weekly PCIC staff meetings I attended. At this meeting, the organizers and leaders present met with a woman who was thinking about running for public office. I was very impressed by the level of reflection and the suggestions the leaders had for her. In half an hour, they were able to figure the political strategy she should follow. Throughout the meeting, they made sure they were in control of the meeting and not her. She introduced herself, shared her political background, and described the electoral race she was entering. As soon as she finished the rest of the participants introduced themselves, and almost automatically one of the leaders said, “You should know that we are a non-partisan organization. As long as you agree on some of our agenda issues, we can work together.”

This unexpected remark set the tone for the rest of the meeting. It created some tension in the room. It set the boundaries for the conversation, and at the same time, it established a desire on the part of PCIC to work with this person. The leaders then continued by asking her questions like, “Why did you decide to run? How are you going to define yourself? What is the message that you are going to run with?” It was as if they had planned for every response the candidate provided ahead of time. When the candidate started naming other known local politicians as part of her campaign team, one of the leaders interrupted her and said, “I don’t think that is a good idea. You are going to be perceived as an activist, to radical. Don’t let those people run your campaign.”

Someone else recommended she run her own individual, unique campaign. Someone else suggested she should appeal to the more moderate Democrats and Republicans, and that she should find allies in the business community. Afterwards I talked with some of the leaders present, one of them said: “We have been doing this [meeting with politicians] for years. The more I do it, the more comfortable I feel about it.” It all seemed seamless, a well-orchestrated meeting. The most impressive aspect of this account is that the PCIC participants had not had time to plan for the meeting before it started.

### **The Practice of Reflection Inside PCIC**

Reflection is a mode of being, a way of stopping distraction, so that you can be a little more objective and learn by absorbing what’s around you. It could be maybe you read an article or book, and you reflect on it. Or it could be reflection after an action or a meeting with politicians. You reflect on it because you want to analyze it, you want to dissect it, but you also want to synthesize it so you can get sort of the essence of that event. It’s a way of reenergizing. You reflect on what has gone on and to help you prepare on what is coming (Source: PCIC organizer).

My investigation found that PCIC organizers believe that reflection is vital for leaders to understand themselves, to understand action, and to develop a vision for the future. In this section I describe the different types of reflection that take place inside PCIC through my observations of meetings, and trainings, as well as interviews of leaders and organizers.

**Evaluation as a form of reflection.** In my two years participating with PCIC, I attended over one hundred meetings and trainings. In most cases these gatherings ended with an evaluation of the event. There were a few distinct types of evaluation used during these vents. As soon as the gatherings finished, the organizer or leader running



the meeting would quickly gather key leaders and invited guests for a brief reflection on how things had gone. She or he would go around the room asking a few of the participants, usually a couple of experienced leaders, a couple of potential leaders, and a couple of allies for a one minute reflection on the meeting or training. They would often ask questions like: “How was this meeting for you?”, “Was it useful?” This kind of reflection would normally take anywhere between five to ten minutes. This kind of reflection is seen as an opportunity to engage new and potential leaders, as well as to recognize the participation of prominent political and community guests. Above all, it is used to energize leaders and allies. There is very little if any dissent around how decisions were made, much less challenges to the internal structure of PCIC.

Immediately after this first round of evaluations was completed, the event organizers, five to ten of them, would gather for a more intimate and honest evaluation. These evaluations tend to be more critical. The organizer will typically ask, “How do you think you did, Robert? Who was here? Who should have been here? How was the energy?” Even here, the organizer tended to be encouraging and positive. As one organizer told me, “we don’t want to scare people away.”

A day or two after the event has taken place, a PCIC staff meeting or a steering committee meeting would be scheduled. It was here that a more rigorous and honest evaluation happened. People could challenge each other, critique each other, confront each other, and talk more frankly about how a meeting or action went. It is here that the leaders and organizers discussed which leaders had energy, talent, and potential to become primary leaders. There was always tension, often confrontation, and an unspoken rule that what is discussed in the group, stays inside the group. This smaller

group of experienced leaders and organizers got to reflect on how meetings, trainings or actions went, but also based on those reflections they would have discussions on strategies for future action. The following excerpt from an interview further describes the nature of discussions inside these meetings:

Reflection means okay, we did this, what the hell are we doing now? Why did we do that, did it make sense? That was a waste of time. What did we get? What didn't we get? What should we have done? What really is at the center of the organization? We've done a lot of reflection in multiple formats that would be instigated by the issues that the organization has chosen likely to take on. What's the price we've paid for it? ...What are the values that run deep, because the costs appear to be escalating? Thinking about the investment of time and energy and focus, it does become riskier. So, is it worth it? Should we have been doing this or not? To me it is good reflection because you have to question, where do your values come from. Why stay in a situation like that when possibly everybody is pretty much jumping ship, what do you do? Are they the smart ones?

**Planned reflection: the role of training inside PCIC.** As I have expressed previously, PCIC leaders repeatedly expressed the need for reflection in order to get reenergized. For some of them, this reenergizing process was tied to reflecting on what some referred to as readings, trainings, or retreats. As a leader told me,

About the time that I was learning to be a leader in PCIC, we had a yearly weekend retreat where Ernie would come. There would always be a lecture or a lesson on some theory on social capital, that's the one that stands out to me the most. I now that Steve has done one-time sessions on strategic planning. All of the little workshop type things they do on national training; a lot of them have sort of an intellectual component to them. It's a theory of social action or sociology or whatever. Those kinds of things were all new to me, but very interesting, because I could learn about them. Yes, you want to apply them in a practical way, but there's just an intellectual satisfaction from learning that. Doing the readings, and then trying to connect up what you learned here to a reading you did here, to an action you are doing here.

For example, during my two-year investigation I participated in weekly PCIC staff meetings. A typical meeting included two or three organizers and three to five

leaders. The following is an example of the learning that took place at these gatherings. This particular meeting began with Peter recommending a few books for the participants to read, considering the current political environment in Arizona and the country. The books he named included: *How Conservatives Won the Heart of America*, *The Maze of Fear*, *The Mind and The Market*, *Gang of Five*, and *Politics and Vision*. Once Peter provided a brief summary for each book, he urged everyone else in the group to read them. The meeting continued with everyone in the room doing rounds. Rounds normally involve people sharing either a recent organizing story, a challenge they faced, people's perspective on a public action, meeting or training, among others. Planned reflection opportunities inside PCIC always started with rounds first. On this occasion the rounds involved a reflection on how people felt about the ongoing campaign to defeat proposition 200. The following are some reflections people shared:

Political campaigns are like having too much chocolate but no nutrients. It is really easy to get seduced by it, but we need to organize. We had no choice, we had to participate. Not participating would have been a betrayal to our people.

I don't like electioneering; I want to do what we do best. I want to go back and organize. Our new leaders have been trained in mobilizing and not organizing.

I didn't like the hysterical nature of campaigning, as well as the fear of losing.

Election campaigns are apocalyptic. When we move out of our organizations how do we maximize our effects?

Mobilizing is part of organizing. I personally enjoyed watching our leaders step up to the challenge. This effort has helped us get into some new parishes. We need to go to strength. We have to work where we have strong leaders and ignore the rest. We did not do that during this campaign. Don't diddle around in the periphery. Don't snipe where we are weak, but where we are strong.

I feel a bit down because we lost at different levels. I hate to be associated with losers, and we lost. The single issue won, and that's not me. Fear won, single issue politics won. We learned from Hauerwas that "if we can't relate to the wickedness of others, we won't recognize it." The conservatives knew about proposition 200 ten years ago, and we did not recognize that. I feel really concerned about Arizona.

My parents were pretty active and that was great for me. Looking at the numbers, we did good work, and we developed relationships at the local and state levels. There is hope; I don't want my kids to grow up here if things continue. That's why we need to change things.

For me, having the relationships, getting more people involved, and connected to institutions was important. But 500 people from a church is not enough, we need 5000 people from a church, and I think that can be done.

Mobilizing gets people tired. It also showed us where we don't have people. In some places it was the organizers and one other leader that did all the work. This campaign also taught me the real value of being a non-partisan organization.

Once everyone had reflected on the campaign for about an hour, Peter stood up and reminded the participants that the next part of the meeting would involve thinking about how to effectively run a meeting or a workshop. He continued,

We need to have institutes of public life. We need to learn how to teach politics. We are in the business of organizing leaders. Who I want on my leadership team is really important. We cannot sacrifice opportunities to identify talented leaders by having bad meetings. Remember that every good meeting has a storyline, a beginning, tension, and an ending. The beginning involves a clear framing of the purpose for the meeting. The meeting has to have tension. There has to be tension in the content of the meeting. We need to be able to go after people. A good ending involves asking people what they learned and what they are going to do about it.

At this point Peter asked the participants in an assertive and intense manner,

Why should people come to listen to you? Why would people want to talk about the qualities of leaders? How you frame a meeting or training has to grab people, it has to capture their attention. The beginning is critical to the workshop. There also needs to be a thematic story. This story has to have political tension; you have to bring the story to life. This tension will make the

actors anxious. People will feel uncomfortable, but also it will generate expectations. So you need to make something happen. You have to create the right environment for this public performance.

At this point Peter asks, “What kills a workshop?” He looks around the room and proceeds,

Lack of interactions will kill the energy. The idea of the trainer as an expert will kill the energy. Good workshops require teachable moments. You need to know who your audience is. You really need to be careful about the selection of participants. You want people that are going to energize the group not disrupt the flow of things... You can kill a training by ending with an abstraction. A good training has to close with tension rather than with abstractions. A clean and clear conceptual understanding is important, but more important is for you to ask, “What are you going to do about it?” It is better to leave the meeting disturbed. Justice is conflict; we need to create constructive environments of tension. You have to ask disturbing questions. We need to integrate stories deeply into trainings. Without them, we are less powerful as organizers. The validity of experience is important; you agitate with it. The more voiceless the people, the more stories are needed.

Once Peter finished, Ana a junior organizer, was asked to facilitate a workshop called “Pressures on Families” with the group. For the next hour Ana, who seemed uncomfortable and nervous, went through this exercise. Peter would stop Ana along the way and the group would give her feedback on areas where she could improve as well as aspects of the training that had worked well. Before the end of the meeting Peter asked people for brief evaluations. He asked people how they were feeling and what they had learned from the training. During my two-year interaction with PCIC I attended a least one weekly reflection opportunity like the one I described above.

During my first year observing PCIC, I also observed three trainings where leaders had to read and discuss how the readings related to the daily practice of organizing. There was also a three- day training organized for one hundred leaders. A

few of those same participants were also able to participate in the IAF's ten-day training. Hundreds of Institutes of Public Life (planned learning opportunities) were also organized. The following excerpts from interviews of leaders and organizers capture the diversity and breadth of these planned reflection opportunities.

You try to create a culture of reading and some discipline, of trying to apply historical narrative to where we are. I think it's very important for people to understand that there is a thread in American politics that is represented by Wallace and Spiro Agnew, and Joe McCarthy, and going all the way back pretty much to the beginning, because it gives people a tool for reflection, and also allows people who are on the receiving end to understand and how to live. Why they are being used in a certain way? Our job is to integrate, hopefully help people develop storylines that they shape, and also to name and defend themselves, which is hopefully what we are trying to do.

We do weekly readings. We read; we study the readings and reflect about what this all means for our job as organizers.

A lot of this work is people work. We need to find time to think through the people you are working with, what their talents are, what their strengths are, what they would be best suited to do; that kind of stuff. The only way you are really are going to have time to think that sort of thing through is by giving yourself the time to reflect about that kind of thing.

We hold trainings where we reflect on our values, our Judeo-Christian values, and we reflect on the work that we have done, and we evaluate it if you will; we look at the work that we have done so that we can critique ourselves. What could we have done better, what could we have changed? At the trainings we learn that is a fundamental part of our learning process

All of these planned reflection opportunities had a cultural critique dimension; they were designed to enhance people's capacity for critical cultural analysis.

Trainings ranged from reflections on the dominant economic and bureaucratic cultures in society, pressures on families, conducting an institutional and community power analysis, and understanding power and decision-making processes, among others.

PCIC leaders expressed to me that these workshops were vital in jumpstarting a

process of questioning and challenging the existing order. As a leader shared with me after a workshop,

When my organization began to evolve through IAF, I saw that the work that I did for a charity organization was good work, but it was a continued kind of service that I was having to provide for the community because people kept coming back for the same service. When IAF came in it was to change the system if you will, to help individuals get to the point where they would be able to take care of themselves, to develop those opportunities, and know how to avail themselves of the opportunities to develop leadership through IAF.

**Mentoring and reflection.** For PCIC leaders, reflection also meant working with people on an individual basis. Many of the leaders I talked to said the relational meetings were central to the work of organizing. Others expressed the vital role that having a mentor or a coach had in their development as leaders.

Based on my conversations with PCIC leaders, mentorship provided ongoing opportunities for people to reflect on their stories and to uncover new dimensions to that story. Mentors also held leaders accountable to having relational meetings, to reflecting on their practice as organizers, among other things. Mentors were vital in coaching people on how to effectively have relational meetings. A mentor would typically ask the following questions during a typical half an hour meeting: How are you doing? What are you thinking about (in regards to their organizing work)? Are you facing any challenges? What are you doing about it (the challenges)? How many relational meetings have you had since we last talked? Who have you meet with? What did you learn about her of him? Are you reading? What are you reading? How does the reading inform your organizing work? What are your plans between now and our next meeting? Is there anything you would like to ask me? The following excerpts further illustrate people's perceptions of mentorship inside PCIC.

Today I had a meeting with Joe. He had asked me to think about my story and write about it. Then I told it to him and we talked about it. That helps me reflect. I found out there was much more to my story that wasn't there. It helps me think about my story.

In general, what I deeply appreciated about having a one-on-one with an organizer was that he made it part of his work, for us to think together. On a regular basis our thinking together, our planning, our time to bounce ideas off each other, and share what we knew, and critique each other's way of thinking, that that was just part of what we did. I had that at that stage. That was really helpful to me.

One thing that the IAF has done really well is train the trainers, so that it's not just the more experienced organizers doing it... but it's them teaching us how to do it. I had an experienced organizer coach me for a few years. The critiques were brutal. Like the first year I had her she had this whole page of notes for me (laughs). The second year she only had a half page. It was brutal, I mean it was absolutely brutal. So it was brutal in the sense that she was in there the whole time, and was watching me, and so I knew what was coming, but for some reason I felt, I remember the first time she said something, and I agreed with everything except one thing, and I told her I don't agree with that. I felt pretty good just to tell her that. I ended up feeling pretty good about it, even though these were critiques of things that I didn't, either messed up or could do better, plus you know some things I did well. I was proud about that, why did I accept that so well?

I see my role as an organizer, as a person who is constantly aware of the skills that different people around me have, and trying to connect with people that have a spark of interest working on community issues or to go farther... beyond just their personal benefit. To get to know them, and have them get to know me, and help them get connected with different people that can help them in their growth as leaders, and also connect them to actions and activities, that we are doing that can help all grow in the community. That's part of it. Another part of it is to help people who are already active as leaders, committed to working in the community, to kind of come together and identify what they want to work on in the community, what are the important things that they care about. Then help them research and choose actions that they think can have an impact on those issues. To think and grow as leaders in community, and pull more people in as leaders in a community.

My investigation shows that new leaders developed their skills by first engaging in PCIC's storytelling pedagogy. Once they developed some basic



understanding of organizing, attended some foundational workshops, and had some experience participating in public actions, they were encouraged to participate in three and ten-day trainings. Three and ten-day training gave leaders a clearer understanding of PCIC's organizing pedagogy. Once they had a good understanding of the content and logic (theories, practices, and experiences) of PCIC's educational model, they were able to more easily focus on how organizers and experienced leaders facilitate the learning process that occurs in the development of leaders. Mentorship was essential to all of these processes. My investigation found that nonformal learning not only deepened people's understanding of the IAF's organizing pedagogy, but it also helped them develop the necessary skills to train and mentor others. At the same time nonformal education inside PCIC can have a silencing effect on PCIC leaders. The next section explores this phenomenon.

### **The Silencing Effect of PCIC's Training Approach**

I attended the IAF's ten-day national training as part of my research. The fifth day of training involved a training called Dominant Culture. The workshop was conducted in a traditional lecture manner. The trainer asked questions; the participants answered them, and the trainer added information when and where the information he deemed necessary was missing. Most of the talking was done by the trainer. The trainer seemed to have an already predetermined idea of what the right answers were.

The trainer, an experienced IAF organizer, began by asking, "What do we mean by culture?" After a few people attempted to answer his question,

Culture involves norms, habits, perspectives and attitudes. How does the IAF look at the world? There is no ideology, but we have developed and are in the

process of developing a critique of the dominant cultures. It is important to critique and understand culture. We need to understand that we have the haves and the have-nots. The haves have all the economic and political power and the have-nots organize to take it away from them slowly. That is our fight.

It is interesting to point out here the trainer's assertion that the IAF is an organization with "no ideology", when in fact the entire training was aimed at getting the participants to embrace the organization's cultural practices and ideological stands.

The trainer continued by writing three concepts/ideas on the board: the powerful corporate sector or the market sector, the public or bureaucratic sector, and the voluntary sector or civic culture. He then said, "We are part of the voluntary sector. Our job is to hold the other sectors accountable. What is the problem with the market culture?" He paused and then elicited a few responses from the participants. While there was some discussion around people's responses, he quickly moved on and said,

The problem is that the market culture dominates the thinking of all three; churches take on perspectives of markets, governments do it too. The voluntary sector is weaker; it is evaporating. It is almost non-existent; they take on the trappings of the two other cultures.

At this point a participant remarked, "Isn't capitalism inherently unfair?" The trainer responded in an aggressive manner,

The market culture is important; it is necessary. We cannot live without markets; they are valuable. Most of us agree markets are essential, but it has to be kept in its place because it can be very destructive.

There was reluctance on the part of the trainer to open the discussion up and listen to perspectives that confronted capitalism more openly. He continued,

Another problem is how culture impacts us and our relationality. By believing in the market we are giving it the rights of persons, thus rights are given to protect corporations. There is this belief in rugged individualism, of the entrepreneur. They forget the idea of welfare economics. Winners don't have to help losers. In order for capitalism to grow, it has to destroy other cultural

forms. The market culture is ahistorical; the only thing that matters is now. The heroes of this system are the entrepreneurs. The more distant from the factory floor, the higher their status. These institutions have a strong support system (schools, foundations), pushing calculated isolating individualism. It is about avoiding pain and seeking pleasure. The market exercises unilateral power. Their heroes are the ones who fire people. We work twenty four seven, all the time so that stores are open twenty-four hours a day. The bureaucratic culture has the trappings of the market culture. The dominant paradigm is the market. We can see it in government and schools.

At this point someone else interjected and expressed frustration with the narrow scope of the analysis conveyed by the trainer. His response to the comment was, “You are reading into things with your feelings and emotions. I’m just trying to explain how culture operates. You are kind of rigid sometimes.” Once again, the trainer refused to have a more open discussion. At the same time, there were some participants who seemed fascinated by the trainer’s description of the dominant culture. At times some people seemed frustrated with people interjecting and disrupting the flow of the training. At one point one of the participants whispered, “This feels like indoctrination to me.” There were clearly conflicting responses to the approach and content of the training. Here the trainer continued,

We make every parent a consumer of the market education. It provides services to people who are clients or patients, nothing else. By reducing your competence, your capability, the bureaucratic culture humiliates you. Humiliation means, to do for you. We cannot tolerate institutions that humiliate adults, which treat them like second-class citizens. The bureaucratic culture by reducing all of us to clients, believes in the rational approach by experts. Experts look at people’s limitations, deficiencies, needs. There is no sense of civic life, no community. They create dependency. The only antidote is not to do for others what they can do for themselves. It does not care about stories, agency, creativity, or imagination. It is all about numbers and metrics. This critique of the market and bureaucratic culture does not mean we need to get rid of them. Capitalism presupposes the existence of trust.

Once again, the trainer felt the need to justify the importance of the market and capitalism. He was not about to change his mind. The last part of the trainer's presentation was better received by most of the participants. He continued,

The voluntary sector [churches, non-profits, unions] used to produce a critique of the market and produced a relational culture. They teach a different way of operating in society. The other two cultures depend on a vibrant relational culture. But instead they are destroying it. In order to care we have to know the story of the other. Do we have the courage and imagination to retrieve those stories? We know markets are vital institutions. If the market is left alone it is amoral, inimical. If capitalism presupposes trust, relational institutions are necessary for just markets. So we need strong and vibrant institutions which enable a relational culture. We need relational institutions, with their own values, independent of the market. They need to apply those values to the market and the bureaucracy to make them function better. Our birthright is our politicalness. We are citizens and neighbors; we are political beings with mutuality for one another. We are made in the image of God, and those symbols are embodied in communities of memory, faith and story. The market culture undermines our capacity for story. In order to have moral persons and agency we need moral and relational institutions that can hold markets accountable for what they do. Our selfhood emerges and is constructed in our relationality. Our birthright requires that we learn our story. It means we have to give up our isolation and emptiness. This is only filled in our communities of memory and relationality. I believe in social markets with constraints and restraints. Intermediate institutions make it possible for us to share prosperity.

While this training aimed at uncovering and challenging the existing order, purposefully the trainer discouraged participation and dissent, and was reluctant to confront capitalism openly. The following excerpt from an interview further illustrates this phenomenon:

In the immigrant churches there is much more toleration for the pastor or someone talking at you. That is more acceptable. On the other hand, there is a much easier time being relational and doing one-on-one and house meetings. People have no problem with that whatsoever, and they understand the value of it. In the middle-class churches they have less patience with the Socratic model, you are limited as far as how much you can do of that, they are much more questioning of who knows the information than in other groups, but they

have a much harder time being relational and seeing the value of being relational.

As we can see from this excerpt, ironically, PCIC leaders call this conventional training approach the “Socratic Method.” The trainer was the sole creator of knowledge; it was only his analysis of culture that mattered. As a result, the workshop produced information and analyses that conformed to the IAF’s analysis and critique of culture. There was no space for dissenting voices to shape the analysis of the dominant culture, much less to question the IAF’s understanding of it. The following analysis of the IAF’s organizational structure brings more clarity to the IAF’s training style.

The IAF has a small national staff, which heads the organization. The organization is divided into smaller organizations by region. Each region in the country has a director. Based on my observations, her/his job is to supervise the direction of each local organization, train and mentor organizers, and occasionally give lectures for leaders at the grassroots level. FD is the director of a regional IAF network. I learned during my investigation that FD has founded many IAF sister organizations. He has received numerous fellowships and awards. He has been a visiting professor at some of the most renowned universities in the United States. He is considered to be one of the most successful community organizers in the country. As I found out in my research, FD is admired and revered by IAF organizers and leaders. He is regarded as a keen tactician, savvy organizer, but above all, an incredibly smart intellectual. It is common to see him carrying a stack of books with him, which may include literature on theology, political thought, political biographies, the Greeks, or

economics. He has a reputation in PCIC for being an avid reader and a fierce debater. He is admired and feared at the same time. Whenever a PCIC organizer announces a workshop with FD, people get very excited because he has a reputation for being a great teacher. The following is a description of a workshop FD led on September of 2004.

About 60 PCIC leaders are gathered as part of PCIC's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. It is 9:00 am, and most of the leaders present at the training had attended the PCIC's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary dinner celebration the night before. People look tired and still half asleep. The planning for the workshop is done at 8:00 o'clock that same morning. After sharing our concern for the lack of planning time, an organizer says, "Don't worry, FD can handle it, he always does. He'll figure it out." There are about sixty or seventy leaders present at the training that day. FD walks in and is quickly introduced by an organizer. FD thanks the organizer for the introduction and walks towards the people sitting at the front of the hall, and staring intensely at them says,

Yesterday was a good story. I know you have been working hard on Proposition 200, so I want to congratulate you for that and for your work for the last fifteen years. However, times are difficult. Are we willing to organize differently?

He walks around the room staring at people as if waiting for an answer. You can see people trying to avoid making eye contact with him. People seem unsure about what to say. A leader in the back says: "Yes, we are." FD looks at him and with a slight smile says in a commanding voice: "Thank you. Fear, anxiety and insecurity are messages we constantly hear. Lee Atwater, Karl Rove's mentor, had a great understanding of

how to be successful by using these messages. He understood the pre-political nature of people.”

By now he has captured people’s full attention. He walks around the room with his usual intensity and confidence and asks: “What does being pre-political mean?” He elicits a few responses from people but seems unsatisfied with the answers. People wonder what kind of an answer he wants. The people sitting next to me prefer not to say anything, because as one of them told me: “I don’t want to give the wrong answer.” Everyone seems very interested in what FD will have to say about it. After a few leaders’ responses he continues:

Being pre-political involves the things you bring with you prior to being a political person. Atwater knew that to be effective, politics should be about cutting backdoor deals, about fear, rather than about reciprocity, deliberation, or representational thinking. What do you think politics should be about?

Again, he goes around the room eliciting a few responses. He says:

In fact, politics is about knowing the other person’s situation. Some people don’t like that, they prefer tribalism; the stranger is the enemy. The Torah says, love your neighbor 7 times, and love the stranger 37 times. Tribalism is about destroying the enemy; it’s about keeping people out. Being tribal, being pre-political is about mobilizing people around anxiety, fear, and insecurities. To be political is about developing, it’s about formation. It requires habits, drills, rituals, that have to be part of any formation practices or culture. One of those habits is the one-on-one, the relational meeting. You’ve got to go and do 1000 of them and draw people out. What’s important about a one-on-one?

He pauses one more time and gets people to tell him what a one-on-one is. A leader gives an answer, and FD says:

You learn something new about yourself, you see yourself differently, and it reminds you of something about yourself. By doing one-on-one, we’ll break down the tribalism in us. We all have pre-judgments and are prejudiced. We always want to blame each other. It’s all of us. We get out of that cycle by getting to know others, their hopes, fears, and mortality. We’ve got to learn to

be political even with growers and bankers. To understand all is to forgive all. Understanding happens outside of ourselves. We need to form institutions that teach us that.

He pauses briefly:

Back in 1948, the Dixiecrats who were democrats and racists became Republicans. Democrats took over the Republicans in the south and ran a politics of fear. What are we trying to build? Institutions, mini-universities of public life, but also habits, institutions that teach habits that are necessary for public life. Formation is difficult because we love activity, action. There has to be formation and preparation, understanding of where we are going. We need mediating and intermediate institutions that can do that. Americans have an Augustinian soul, self-absorbed, narcissistic...De Tocqueville saw an antidote to that; face-to-face engagement, local politics of schools and township. We need to learn how to draw out as well as draw yourself out. Learn to be attentive, listen, learn to figure the context situation, it's hard, you need a mentor evaluating and critiquing you. The Augustinian soul is entrepreneurial and greedy and it's imposed on other people. We have the right way. We make larger claims on life, and the antidote is family and religion, our institutions, our congregations. Last night I saw a strategy to take steps to do that. We need patience, passion, imagination, and curiosity. Remember that mobilizing is easy; organizing is difficult. It requires patience, understanding, humor and hard work. Can you do it by yourself? We are all adolescent; we have the adolescent character of instant gratification. We can't take time to prepare. Can we reclaim the culture of the world where we sit at the same table, where we come together to celebrate stories, rituals, and understanding of the world.

At this point another leader jumps in and says: "We have institutional tribalism inside our churches." FD acknowledges the comment and continues,

We can have our identity and engage in serious, meaningful dialogue. We need institutions that understand what real conversations are about. Stories remind me of other stories; they help me formulate strategies, ideas and questions about where we are. Without that, we are just mobilizing. We'd be fighting pre-politicalness with our own pre-politicalness. I stereotype all the time. The stranger is the enemy.

He stops, looks around the room and asks Martha to stand up and says: "Martha, give me an example of pre-politicalness in your church." She stands up and in a nervous



tone replies: “At my church, I struggle with why people resist this work so much. I know we get people from all over; it is not your traditional neighborhood church, but still.” FD acknowledges her comment and continues,

Remember Mathew’s Gospel, many are called but few are chosen. You’ll go after lots of people, but will get few. Saul sowed a seed in a place with rocks and thorns, it was not good ground. Look for people like yourself who are curious, interesting and willing to consider other perspectives. The question is how do we develop that? Some people use impotent rage; this is how some of us teach politics. This is how good people learn how to hate people. We demonize our opposition.

At this point FD approaches me and says: “Mr. Ojeda, come with me please.” We are now standing in front of the audience, and I am wondering what he is going to ask me. He looks at me and says: “Mr. Ojeda, can you summarize for us what being pre-political is?” I tell him my version of the concept. Then he continues, “How about being political?” Once I’m done describing what being political means, he thanks me and I walk back to my seat. FD asked other leaders present that day, to come up to the front and share their thoughts with the larger group.

After the workshop, I get a chance to talk to a few leaders. They look excited, energized. People seem to think this was a great success. As one of them told commented: “I had not thought of organizing in terms of being political and pre-political. This was great. FD is so good.”

Since I began researching PCIC in 2004, FD has come to Tucson three times, and every time he has had the same effect on leaders. One interesting thing about his interaction with leaders is that leaders hardly challenge him, partly because of the perception among PCIC leaders is that he always has something smart to say. Part of

his perceived success as a trainer has to do with his control of the trainings and the vast knowledge he has. In a typical workshop he can quote Greek philosophers, tell great organizing stories, and delve into theology or political thought. He can easily quote political philosophers, sociologists, theologians, and passages from the Bible and other religious texts. He is always using practical examples and eliciting stories. He stares at people intensely, gets very close to them, he is loud and always appears to be in command. He intimidates and inspires people at the same time. He is always catching people off balance, off guard. As a PCIC leader put it:

I liked the way FD had a relationship every step of the way, with the people that he was with. He was never lecturing to an audience, he was with them, and he was building, and he would know who he was interested in beforehand, and then hone in right in that person. “What do you think about what I just said? You look like you didn’t agree with me. Did that make you uncomfortable? Well, come up here a minute,” he’d say. That used to happen to me a lot. “Come up here a minute, I want to just talk to you about this.” It would be something about; maybe it might be, what’s the most important part of an action? “We’ll come on, you can tell us, what do you think, what’s the most important part of an action?” I would be madly thinking, “Oh God,” and I would then completely put myself in his shoes and would say, “What would FD think?” It was the reflection afterwards, what would you mean by that? What would you mean by reflection after an action? So probing, pushing, you never were at the end of something, and you always felt like you were being pushed into deep waters, sometimes and in public. I didn’t mind the discomfort, but I did like the attention that I was getting. I did begin to feel like I was being developed and I wanted to be.

Because of his perceived knowledge of organizing, his powerful public persona, his command of classic theological, political, sociological and other texts, his keen understanding of politics, and his vast experience, he is admired, respected and often imitated by organizers. Organizers imitate his intense stare, they appear in control at all times, and they try to quote from the Greek philosophy, political thought, and theology just like FD. One organizer told me: “Organizers try to act the way FD does.

They want to be accepted.” Another organizer expressed:

There is a pecking order, and you’re either in it or you’re not. I haven’t done a good job of getting in it. An organizer that is working with me said, “Next time we meet, I want to talk about how you relate to FD, and how you stay in relationship with him.” I thought, I hope he doesn’t bring that up again, which is crappy because I ought to be working with him on just that; helping him figure out how he relates to colleagues and supervisors within IAF. I’ve done such a crappy job at it; I’m not the person he ought to be talking to. Shit, I’m not one of the insiders, I guess. I think in terms of where FD is, I need to be much closer, and I’m not there. For a long time I think I wanted to be there, but didn’t have the guts, and maybe even the confidence to try to be, but now I’m okay, I’m actually okay with where I am. You’re asking the wrong person. I think you have to be interesting, this is just for him; I think you have to be interesting to him. You have to show that you are interested in him. Sometimes I look at people that are on the inside and it seems like they are just doing things for him, and I don’t really want to be doing that. I mean he’s brilliant, and I think he’s hilarious, I think he’s a very funny guy.

As I described above, in my two years participating with PCIC and AIN I noticed that the same in-your-face, somewhat confrontational Socratic approach used by FD is replicated when junior organizers lead workshops. They often use the same gestures and language as FD.

Organizers’ positions of power come from a few main sources. The more senior one is as an organizer, the more respect and deference one gets. The more intellectual and academic you appear, the more seriously you are taken. Part of the organizer’s power is tied to the language they use, which often comes out of, as I expressed before, philosophy, history, political science, and theology texts among others. Most training sessions organized by IAF resemble a university class. In addition, PCIC leaders perceive that because organizers are paid well to do their job, they have much more time to learn about issues, and to think about and to teach others. There is a notion that organizers know better. Because they know better,

because of their confrontational approach to teaching, leaders hesitate to participate or to challenge them.

As we can see, because the organizer comes to the interaction from a position of power, and because of the confrontational nature of these interactions, rather than enhancing people's participation, it limits it. People experience learning in PCIC through a transformational process that allows them to critically reflect about the socioeconomic and political context at the local, state, and national levels, but does little to question the PCIC culture itself. Critical transformative conversations take place inside PCIC, but they seldom serve to look at the culture and pedagogy of the organization, particularly at decision-making processes inside the organization. PCIC's transformative pedagogy may end up strengthening and preserving the existing culture of the organization. We have seen, so far, the contested and complex ways in which PCIC leaders learn. The process of how decisions are made inside PCIC exemplifies the silencing effect that the lack of critical reflection in relation to its own institutional practices has on PCIC's leaders. I illustrate this dynamic next.

### **Decision-making Inside PCIC**

Most experienced leaders told me that decisions in PCIC ideally came from the bottom up. As I often heard, "PCIC actions are driven by hundreds of house meetings and one-on-ones. This is how we find out what stories people have, and concerns they have. That is how we figure out which fights to fight." Although participatory decision-making was part of the rhetoric of most organizers and leaders, in practice this was not the case. This was particularly true of how decisions were made regarding whether or not to organize against the PAN initiative. Most of the planning and

strategy meetings took place in Phoenix or Casa Grande. Not everyone in Tucson was invited and of those who did get invited, only a few could make the meetings. PCIC leaders would later be informed that a group of leaders, one or two from Tucson, had gone up to Phoenix representing PCIC, where the decision to participate had been made. Most of the leaders in Tucson simply ratified most decisions that were being made in Phoenix. When I noticed this dynamic, I started asking leaders and organizers what their sense was of how decisions were made inside PCIC. Although most of them would begin by giving me PCIC's espoused theory on decision-making, "We do it by having house meetings, one-on-ones, and learning about people's stories and issues;" they eventually told me that in practice things didn't always work that way. The next excerpts illustrate this dynamic:

They say that the issues come up in house meetings, and that somehow, then those issues are distilled into an agenda, which is then by common consent or formal ratification, created to be the agenda of the organization. I think that to some extent it happens, and it specially happens when you're organizing a local church or another organization. But I think there's also a whole lot of decisions that get handed down from the top, especially the political decisions about what we are going to focus on, what we are going to take on. But then, maybe that's more statewide... Like the decision to focus on elections and voter turnout. We all understand why that's necessary. I'm not sure that that was a decision that bubbled up from the grassroots. I think that came from, "If you want to have power, you've got to do this." That was kind of the way that was presented. Fortunately there are enough people who are interested in that part of it to buy into it. I think this whole Prop. 200 thing is a good example of, "Yeah, we had to take it on." [But] Did we need to take it on the way we took it on?

They have all these party lines. What's another way of saying it? There's all these teachings in PCIC (he laughs), and I think in the IAF really... I assume in terms of community organizing nationwide that none of these groups have as much power as IAF. So I want to go with the winner, you know. One of the party lines, excuse me, one of the teachings is, it's a leaders' organization. It means that whatever the leaders want is going to happen. In theory you don't have issues that are your issues. You go out and do individual meetings and

house meetings, and out of that comes an agenda, and then the leaders are the ones that make decisions. But I think there should be more tension between leaders and organizers, because it's not the leaders' organization. Ultimately, it's the organizers' organization. The organizers at the very top, it's their organization. It's just what is. I could say they are just a bunch of hypocrites and a bunch of culeros or whatever, and I'm not going to work with them anymore, and I feel like that all the time, but then I have to take a deep breath and figure out, "Damn, how are we going to give voice to the families." Then you figure out how you marshal whatever power you have, be it people power, or money power, social capital power, you as a leader, you as an institution and then go out and take the power you have and make PCIC sit down and negotiate with you and come out with things that will benefit the families within our institutions.

Both of these PCIC leaders were deeply committed and active within the organization. Furthermore, both held influential positions within PCIC. Both of them told me they stayed with PCIC because they believed in the work of the organization. They understood, as a leader told me, "Things are not perfect, like with most organizations."

Most of the PCIC leaders I had conversations with valued what the organization had done for poor families in Tucson. As I've expressed before, leaders knew what the ideal PCIC organizing model should look like, and recognized that in practice this did not always happen. The following example further explains this contradiction.

About year ago we were in the middle of the city elections, down to the last six weeks, and all of a sudden, a decision is made that the organization would help host a meeting in Phoenix with President Fox from Mexico. We complained and challenged that decision, but they went ahead and did it. Instead of focusing on Tucson, many of our leaders had to work on the Fox event. We ended up being 700 votes short in the mayoral election. It was a fourteen hundred vote margin; with 700 hundred votes we would have had a mayor that would have supported PCIC. But because the decision was made for us, we lost. We worked hard in the election, but that decision was ultimately made at the State level. I know how the lead organizers play the game. They talk about organizing and building power, but at the center of everything is their very interest.

These excerpts show there was a sense within the leadership of the organization that a few at the top of the organization make decisions, and at the same time, there was an acceptance that someone had to make them. Still, there was discontent at the local level, as the following excerpt shows. PCIC leaders had gotten used to the realities described previously. Few of them questioned the decision-making processes inside the organization. They knew that deals were made at AIN meetings, and that the PCIC leaders' job was to implement those decisions. This dynamic ended up affecting morale inside PCIC. Some leaders even resented the organization. One time I asked a key PCIC leader what she thought of how things were going inside PCIC. She said: "Organizers drain people, use them and then move on to other people."

When leaders and organizers did question how decisions were made, questions that challenged the organizational culture, they were not taken seriously. Although critical conversations did take place in very small and private settings, collective spaces for these conversations were not commonplace inside PCIC. For example, at a PCIC leaders' meeting someone questioned the way decisions were being made regarding the organization's issues agenda for 2005. A more experienced leader interrupted him and said: "Part of becoming a leader is to be able to suspend judgment and truly learn. We have always done it this way, and it works well." A day later at a PCIC staff meeting, one of the PCIC organizers told this same leader in a very confrontational manner, "The comments you made yesterday were polarizing to the leaders of the organization. We had some new people there. We need to exercise better judgment." This type of comments discouraged any kind of dissent inside PCIC.

Another example of this phenomenon involved an organizers' training that took place in 2004. The participants had been going around the room taking turns reflecting on how people were doing. One of organizers said, "After going to the training in Austin, I realize that we speak a militaristic and imperialistic language."

She waited for people to respond to her comment, but there was only silence in the room. She then continued, "Many years ago, I discouraged my brother from working at Company X when he was young. I feel strange, having to ask for money from Company X. I don't believe in a bomb making organization."

When she finished, there was again absolute silence in the room. No one responded to her comments. People just looked at the lead organizer as if waiting for him to say something. He quickly moved on to the next person, completely ignoring her comments. At another point during the same meeting, the same organizer made the comment, "I won't read the Eucharist, it was written from a male perspective."

It was particularly evident to me during my investigation, that anyone's challenge to traditional male cultural practices inside PCIC, were quickly quieted and discouraged, as the previous quotation shows. People sitting around the table once again disregarded her comments. During lunch break, I sat down to eat with four organizers. I asked them what they thought of the one organizer's comments. They all agreed that it was terrible for a junior organizer to have made those comments inside this meeting. As one of them said, "This was not the right place or time for those comments." Another one said, "She must have issues with the Church." They all laughed at the comment, and that was the end of the conversation.



While I understood PCIC's emphasis on teaching leaders how to develop political judgment, what organizers also referred to as the "art of practicing taking calculated risks," when was it okay for leaders and organizers to be completely honest and express what they were thinking? The following excerpts further illustrate this tension.

I remember arguing with [Jim], because at the beginning he said to me, "Why do you want to do this work?" I said, "One of the reasons is that I'd like to see more women involved in positions of leadership. I think it's very important for women to develop a voice." He said, "we don't do gender politics." I said, "Maybe you should." He said, "If you think we should, maybe you should go somewhere else. We've been doing what we do for sixty years, and it's worked very well for us. This is the way that we do it. If you want to learn about it and become an apprentice, which I'm not sure you do, but if you do then this is the way it is. If you could give us a good reason why we should change it, then you may try, but I doubt you'll find one. This is the IAF, this is the way. We've tried it and tested it, this works; this is what we do.

I think it [what you can say inside PCIC] depends on how far you want to go in the organization...One of the things that freed me up to feel more comfortable to challenge people is that I stopped caring about whether I have their respect to move forward in the organization or not. I became more accountable to myself, and what I felt was right or wrong... What I have seen happening is that people that may want to go further in the organization are more cautious. There is definitely a hierarchy and people seem to want to respect that if they want to move forward, and I don't like that... It limits people in how active they can really be, how much of themselves they are able to bring to the table. If you say you are a broad-based organization, then, let it be messy. Let people challenge the leadership. Let people have to negotiate action or decisions with each other. I just think it's not very interesting if decisions are being made at a higher level. If people don't have the freedom to challenge that, or to challenge the leadership without feeling like their careers are going to be restricted; it reminds me of the hierarchy in the church. I grew up in the church and I was just really aware of who you could say what to. My father was pretty active in our parish. There was just a lot of politics and bureaucracy. If you wanted your issues to get any attention or to get anything done, you had to say the right things to the right people.

As the previous excerpts convey, leaders experienced learning in PCIC through a transformational process that allowed them to critically reflect about the socio-

economic and political context at the local, state, and national levels, but did little to question the PCIC culture itself. While critical transformative conversations took place inside PCIC, they seldom served to look at the culture and pedagogy of the organization, particularly at decision-making processes inside the organization. My investigation showed that critical reflection happened as people engaged in personal and collective storytelling, and as they participated in social action, but ironically, PCIC seemed to be beyond critique.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

### **Summary of the Problem**

In this dissertation I have argued there is a perceived crisis in our current democratic system. Some attribute this crisis to what Barber (1984, p. xi) calls “too little democracy,” which results in alienation characterized by plummeting electoral participation figures, distrust of politicians, and apathy regarding other forms of political participation (Barber, 1984; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Osterman, 2002; Putnam, 2000; Schugurensky, 2003; Warren, 2001). Those who propose a solution suggest that people must become engaged in public life: changes must emerge from the local level, cultivated within organizations of civil society.

Organizations such as the IAF are schools for effective citizenship and civic learning (Barber, 1984; Foley, 1999; Osterman, 2002). They teach citizens the necessary skills to educate people about political issues and the capacities for engaging effectively in civic life (Osterman, 2002). These learning processes lead to individual as well as social transformation (Schugurensky, 2001; Scott, 2004). In this sense, transformative learning is an essential component of reengaging people in public life (Schugurensky, 2001). By looking at organizations within civil society, more specifically organizations like the IAF, we may find some useful ways to reengage citizens in social action and bring strong democratic practices back.

The purpose of this study was to explore and document the extent to which learning and education enhance political learning and citizenship for Strong

Democracy. This investigation looked at the dynamics of learning in social action. This entailed observing how people experience learning inside the IAF.

### **Studies on the IAF**

The IAF has been extremely effective in terms of organizing lasting grassroots participatory democratic practices within diverse groups of people (Coles, 2006). Most major studies of the IAF (Chambers, 2003; Freidus, 2000; Osterman, 2002; Scott, 1991, 2004; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998) conclude that the IAF fosters participatory democratic decision-making processes, builds social capital, gains political power, and builds stable organizations. Most importantly, it uses a transformative pedagogy as a central component of its leadership development and organizing strategy (Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2006; Freidus, 2000; Osterman, 2002; Scott, 1991, 2004; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998).

Even though the training and development of leaders is central to the IAF's organizing work, the learning dimension in this context has hardly been studied. Furthermore, within the few studies that do look at learning inside IAF (Chambers, 2003; Freidus, 2000; Osterman, 2002; Scott, 1991, 2004; Warren, 1998), there is very little questioning of whether or not the IAF's pedagogy enhances individual and social transformation, or if it rather contributes to the reification dominant organizational practices. By not having a more critical stance on power differentials around race, class and gender, the IAF may be contributing to maintaining the existing organizational power structures, thus inadvertently contributing to the reproduction of injustice and inequality (Fisher, 1994; Coles, 2006). The IAF may be creating a false sense of social transformation, one that appears liberating, but in reality continues to

be oppressive. In this chapter I provide summaries of the most important themes and insights that were uncovered from my investigation of PCIC. First I look at the paradox between PCIC's espoused pedagogical approach and what happens in their organizational practice. I also examine how my findings relate to the scholarly literature of storytelling for social action, transformative learning, informal learning in social action, and democratic participation. I highlight the theoretical contributions the study makes in these areas, and address practical implications for improving PCIC's pedagogical model. I conclude with recommendations for future research.

### **Findings: The Pedagogical Paradox of Community Organizing Inside the IAF**

This study shows that the central goal of PCIC's pedagogical approach was to commit volunteers to the organization's activist agenda. It is precisely this pedagogical approach that contributed to the pedagogical paradox of community organizing inside PCIC. There are two simultaneously occurring cultural practices inside PCIC that inform this paradox. On one hand PCIC's storytelling and relational organizing pedagogy engage people in a cathartic emotional/affective process which allows them to uncover painful past experiences. The process of telling/sharing these experiences/stories has a powerful emancipatory effect on PCIC leaders. This process changes people's self-perceptions and encourages them to speak publicly about these painful experiences. Emancipatory learning allows people to identify the source/root causes of their pain. It engages people in a process of reflecting on the following questions: Where is my pain coming from? What are the issues/ root causes of this pain and unjust situation? What am I willing to do about it? What resources do I have to change this unjust situation? This emotional and cathartic process inspires people,

strengthens their sense of self, allows them to critically reflect on the causes of their pain, moves them from an individual self-interest to a collective one, to the common good, and supports social/collective action.

At the same time there are cultural practices inside PCIC that have silencing tendencies for leaders inside the organization. PCIC use of the “Socratic Method,” a question and answer training approach, ends up reaffirming/supporting the organizations pedagogical practices, and prevailing /existing organizational practices and structures. The trainer holds and disseminates the knowledge that matters and disregards perspectives that do not conform to the existing organizational culture. This valued knowledge includes theology, political theory, Greek philosophy and political thought, among others. Furthermore, the trainer conducts the training in an aggressive, confrontational, and intimidating manner. The goal of his training approach is that the ideal learner ought to aspire to be an effective, aggressive, and fierce debater, while simultaneously embracing the organizations dominant cultural practices. This pedagogical approach is biased towards participants that have either formal educational experience, are male, or come from middle-class backgrounds. Unless, minorities and women learn to interact in aggressive and confrontational ways, their perspectives are not heard inside PCIC. While ideally decisions inside PCIC should come from the bottom up, the same group of people whose knowledge is privileged inside PCIC, happens to be the one making the most important decisions inside the organization. When PCIC leaders questioned how decisions were made inside the organization they were not taken seriously. Although critical conversations took place in very small and private settings, collective spaces for these conversations seldom

took place. This study found that critical reflection and emancipatory learning occurred as people engaged in personal and collective storytelling, and as they participated in social action, but ironically, PCIC's organizational practices were beyond critique.

An example of the paradox described above is seen in what happened with one of PCIC's member organizations, Team B. In the early nineties Team B leaders decided to join PCIC. During the next five years Team B was able to develop a strong team of leaders who were all deeply involved and trained by PCIC. Because of the training and relationship with PCIC Team B had a visible and powerful presence in Tucson as well as a team of well-trained leaders working closely with PCIC. The consensus among this group of Team B leaders was that had it not been for PCIC's training they would have never become active and effective community organizers in Tucson. All of them had gone through powerful personal transformative experiences and had built an even more powerful collective. Although Team B understood the importance of the relationship with PCIC, particularly PCIC's emancipatory pedagogy, there was eventually internal tension around PCIC's silencing practices. Some Team B leaders felt like PCIC was simply using them to mobilize people and had little interest in listening to their perspectives on internal decision-making or training/teaching methodology. On one hand Team B leaders understood the vital role PCIC had had in providing tools for emancipatory/transformative learning to take place, and at the same time they felt frustrated with the confrontational and aggressive culture inside the organization. Eventually Team B decided to leave PCIC and continue to organize in a manner that was more sensitive to their internal culture

(mostly made up of working class families, minorities, and women). This example shows that emancipatory practices can overcome some of PCIC's silencing ones. During this investigation I found there were other teams that decided to leave PCIC for similar reasons.

While previous studies on the IAF have provided useful descriptions of the IAF's organizing model and practices (Chambers, 2003; Gecan, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Scott, 2004; Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001), I suggest they fall short of providing analyses that account for the complex and contested nature of the learning that occurs inside the IAF (Foley, 1999). My review of studies on the IAF suggests that scholars have been overly concerned with the role of rational dialogue in explaining the development of IAF leaders. Furthermore, most of the IAF studies fail to provide an explanation of how power differential around issues of class, race, and gender shape how leaders experience learning. These studies particularly lack analyses of how power relations either enhance or limit people's learning and participation in social action. This investigation suggests that a full understanding of how people participate in community organizing efforts requires that we use a lens that accounts for the effect that gender, race, class, and the socio-cultural and historical environment have in shaping the organizations cultural and pedagogical practices (Cervero & Wilson, 2001, 2006; Clark & Wilson, 1991; Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 1999; Niewonly & Wilson; 2006, 2009). In this regard, this investigation makes an important contribution to the empirical and theoretical research that examines how socio-cultural, historical, and political factors shape the learning inside community organizing organizations.



Most empirical and theoretical studies on the IAF conclude that its leadership development pedagogy is effective at forming diverse coalitions (based on race, ethnicity, and class), which foster participatory democratic decision-making processes and support individual and social change (Chambers, 2003; Hess, 1999; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998). They also suggest the IAF's organizing model holds promise for a new kind of democracy, one based on relational organizing practices (Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2006; Freidus, 2000; Osterman, 2002; Rodgers, 1990; Stout, 2010; Warren, 1998). Following a critical realist framework of analysis (Archer, 1995; Bhaksar, 1989; Collier, 1994; Porter, 2002), this study found that while the pedagogy that PCIC employs has true transformational potential in its substance, in practice it has not fulfilled its potential for effecting critical, collective change. The findings of this study suggest that the disconnect between theory and application in the ideology of transformative learning inside PCIC occurs at the site of institutional self-awareness. In other words, while promoting critical reflection at the individual and communal levels, PCIC in various ways disallows critical reflection in relation to its own institutional practices.

Contemporary scholar of PCIC's parent organization IAF, Romand Coles, concluded in a 2006 analysis that, while the success of organizations other than the IAF have been largely marginal in recent decades, the IAF itself has been uniquely effective in organizing for lasting change. However, in the same analysis Coles recognized a puzzling contradiction: that the IAF is in particular respects characterized by a "politics of containment" (2006, p. 549). While Coles ultimately concluded that that the work of the IAF is grounded in a strong critique of dominant ideology and

culture, presumably trumping the non-inclusiveness of its institutional culture, my investigation suggests that the true nature and potential of the IAF is revealed in examination of the precise nexus that Coles identified: the ideological space in which paradoxically coexist the IAF's insightful and strong critique of dominant cultural paradigms and its heretofore largely unrecognized reproduction of those same paradigms. In what follows, I further illustrate this dynamic by looking at PCIC's storytelling pedagogy.

### **The Evocative and Emotional Nature of Storytelling**

While I was living in the barrio my family thought, "Well, maybe we needed to get out of the barrio and go into a middle class neighborhood". When we went from the barrio to a middle class neighborhood, we were immediately treated differently. We were accused of having lice, we were accused of not bathing, and that was real difficult. So we tried to go back to the barrio, but because we had been living in a different neighborhood, we weren't allowed to go back. I had to go to a white school, and that really shaped me, because I was in this place where I wasn't welcomed. I recall that early story about feeling that humiliation...People don't understand what other people are going through, and unless we connect our story; until we connect to people's anger, and then think about what that is doing, we won't be able to act...My anger has changed, and the anger has changed based on who I'm in relationship with. My anger has changed because I've connected with other people's anger and other people's story, and reflected with other people about where they are. It's almost like wearing somebody else's shoes.

My investigation showed that storytelling is PCIC's main transformative pedagogical tool. Storytelling has the potential to be a powerful factor for both personal and social transformation (Rappaport, 1997). In fact, proponents of storytelling in social action suggest storytelling may be what most distinguishes Strong Democracy from Liberal Democracy (Coles, 2006; Ganz, 2001; Polleta, 1998; Rappaport, 1995; Young, 1996). The findings of this study showed that PCIC's

storytelling pedagogy has an emotive and cathartic effect on PCIC leaders, one vital in addressing people's painful life experiences and essential in developing people's sense of agency. I analyze this phenomenon further, next.

Scholars of transformative learning debate what triggers transformative learning (Sands & Tennant, 2010). The emotional and affective dimensions of learning have become increasingly important within the field of transformative learning (Taylor, 2007). This study supports empirical and theoretical studies that highlight the role of emotions in transformative learning. When asked what they had learned while participating with PCIC, most of the leaders I interviewed said that through storytelling they were able to connect with their pain and loss, as the following excerpts illustrate.

There was a recognition that it was okay to have a story, and that it was okay to talk about things. There was a recognition that, "yeah, this wasn't right."

We learn to understand where we come from, and why we get angry about why the people keep suffering. The system is what angers me, that there is a system out there that we have got to change in order for these families to receive fair treatment and be able to treat them with dignity.

My investigation showed that storytelling evoked strong emotions in people, which in turn jumpstarted a process of reflection on the personal and social roots of injustice. Before they could participate fully in social action, their sense of self had to transform. The findings of this study support the idea that an essential condition for people to participate fully in public action involves their capacity to access the emotional resources that can expand their sense of self. Stories become our emotional and moral learning, which allow us to have the courage and hope to deal with pain and

hopelessness (Jasper, 1998). The following narrative captures the importance of emotions inside PCIC's storytelling pedagogy.

I was the only one who was Hispanic, the only one with a Master's education, and I also had some previous experience as a cashier. They gave the job to seven of those people as cashiers and folding clothes. I was the only one that got the job of cleaning floors, and bathrooms, taking the gum off the floors. I got fewer hours, and got paid less.

Notice the emotional transitions that these stories and storytellers convey. The stories begin by conveying deep pain and loss. This deep sense of loss leads the storyteller to feel anger and humiliation, which turns into a feeling of grief. Grieving emotions lead the storyteller into a state of acceptance and recognition, and eventually a feeling of hope and a sense of agency. Brueggemann (1987) suggests the victims of injustice are paralyzed and intimidated through a carefully nurtured symbiotic relationship of dependency upon the system. He further proposes that the only way to move in the face of injustice is by the "public processing of pain" (p. 16). By processing pain in relationship, through storytelling, PCIC leaders entered "an intentional act of expressing grievance" (Brueggemann, 1987, p. 16). Furthermore, the process of PCIC leaders telling and retelling personal and collective stories led to the formation of collective wrath, which in turn generated "risky, passionate social power" (Brueggemann, 1987, p. 17). We see this phenomenon further illustrated in the following excerpts.

After becoming a leader, I began thinking, maybe there something else I could have done. I've learned that you don't have to be quiet when something happens to you or to your family. There is a time and a place where you can put that anger that you have, and aim it towards something.

Once I started telling it I realized that many others were in my situation, I realized that stories are important and that I had a responsibility to tell it, and get other people to realize that their immigrant stories are important as well. It was now my moral responsibility, that why I would take those risks

My investigation showed that that the affective dimension of storytelling was the catalyst for PCIC leaders to be able to develop support for collective action and the common good. My study also revealed that once this cathartic storytelling process was set in motion, it jumpstarted a process of leaders sharing stories through relational and house meetings, which in turn further expanded and deepened their self-perception and sense of agency. This cathartic process also fostered deeper relationships among leaders, and it encouraged the development of a collective vision for social change. This study supports previous empirical and theoretical work that contends that storytelling is central to the development of personal and social transformation (Rappaport, 1995). It also supports the idea that there is a reciprocal relationship between individual and collective story development. As Scott (2004) argues, transformation requires the personal and social constructions of reality. The social construction of transformation emerged simultaneously in the learner and the setting.

Once PCIC leaders became members of this community of storytellers, which expressed their grievances publicly, they were able to create an alternative story and deeper relationships. Brueggemann (1987) argues the act of pain is an act of defiance and protest; it is an act of hope. The process of uncovering common values and beliefs, which results in deeper connections among leaders, was learned as PCIC leaders immersed themselves in a process of storytelling. PCIC leaders were able to go beyond their original assumptions about each other. This happened progressively as

people told their stories. Trust among PCIC leaders came out of a deep understanding of each others' pain and values (Brueggemann, 1987; Ganz, 2001), and that is what sustained people's commitment to the organization during challenging times.

Storytelling allowed PCIC leaders to recognize the emotional resources for the motivation to act on those ends (Bradt, 1997; Brueggemann, 1978; Peterson, 1999; Sarbin, 1995). Stories became their moral or emotional learning, which allowed them to have the courage, love, and hope they needed to deal with the fear, isolation, pain, and hopelessness which limits their action (Jasper, 1998; Taylor, 1989). As effective as storytelling is within PCIC in harnessing emotions, there are clear shortcomings in the PCIC pedagogy. I now discuss these problems.

Storytelling and relationship building are historically feminist approaches to community building (Hart, 1990; Lange, 2004, Young, 1996). This study shows that in PCIC these practices take place within a generally white patriarchal culture. For example, since PCIC leaders and organizers often have to face tough opponents within the established political and economic system, they are taught they need to be aggressive, assertive, and often confrontational. These white patriarchal behaviors are practiced as people engage with public officials or people from the business community, and they are often practiced among leaders during trainings, and relational and house meetings. There is a constant clash between these two cultural practices inside PCIC. Because storytelling takes place within a dominant male organizational culture, its transformative potential may be at risk inside PCIC. Since stories are individual, cultural and ideological productions, they have the potential to reproduce existing social relations and power dynamics (Bell, 2003; Delgado 1995; van Dijk,

1984; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). PCIC's goal is for people to integrate into its culture and embrace the organization's identity. There is a belief inside PCIC that if internal conflict arises, the relational cultural practices of the organization, democratic deliberation, and negotiation can overcome any problems. However, PCIC's emphasis on deliberation and negotiation ignores issues of privilege based on gender, class, or race. As a result, PCIC seeks solutions devoid of gender, race, or class analyses. There is an expectation that PCIC's storytelling pedagogy can break stereotypes and lead to solidarity across race and class. In this sense, does PCIC's storytelling pedagogy subliminate and subordinate people's real interests and agendas? Who determines which stories are told? What are stories used for? Is PCIC's storytelling pedagogy used to enhance democratic participation or is it used to sell the organizers' agendas? In this sense, some scholars of storytelling have suggested more attention ought to be paid to the manipulative, deceiving, and seducing potential of storytelling (Carr & Lapp, 2008; Du Toit & Reissner, 2011, 2012; Gabriel, 2004; Reissner, 2009). They further suggest much of the literature on storytelling treats stories as neutral constructs rather than exploring the power relations that shape how stories are constructed and used (Carr & Lapp, 2008; Du Toit & Reissner, 2011, 2012; Gabriel, 2004). This study found that when organizers told stories it was with the intent of getting the listener to ascribe to the tellers worldview. This phenomenon was particularly salient when organizers tried to justify internal decision-making processes.

At the same time, "people promote strategic interests in the stories they tell" (Bell, 2003; Delgado 1995; Wetherell & Potter, 1992; van Dijk, 1984), and as such, "storytelling can be a form of cultural activism" (Morales, 1998, p. 5). In other words,

the process of personal and collective story development inside PCIC has the potential to challenge internal cultural practices. This is because of the rich analysis and critique of race, gender, and class embedded in the stories; however this does not happen inside PCIC. This complex and contested dynamic is something strong democratic organizations may have to constantly pay attention to, if they hope to practice a deeper form of democracy.

### **Revisiting Transformative Learning**

Hart (2010) suggests democratic learning does not occur in a linear manner. It does not start with ideology critique. Rather, “the learners keep distancing themselves from, and are moving closer to a number of recurring points, each time creating a new loop in a growing and widening spiral” (p. 45). My two-year investigation of PCIC shows that transformative learning occurred in a contested, messy, and often incongruent manner, as Hart suggests. Next, I look at this contested dynamic as it informs individual and social action, critical reflection and ideology critique, power and context, and storytelling in transformative learning.

**Individual and social action.** One of the most controversial discussions within transformative learning involves the relationship between individual transformation and social action (Collard & Law, 1989; Hart, 1990; Newman 1994a, 1994b; Taylor, 2000). The main critique of the dominant transformative theory perspective in the United States, influenced by Jack Mezirow’s theory of transformational learning, is that it privileges individual change over social action (Collard & Law, 1989, Finger & Asun, 2001; Hart, 1990; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Taylor, 2000). This dominant transformative theory paradigm is tied to the idea that



the learner is the unit of analysis; learning is seen as an individual process, which allows one in turn to minimize questions of how class, gender, race, and the socio-cultural and historical factors inform learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Hart, 2000; Tisdell, 1998, 2001).

My investigation shows that PCIC's pedagogical practices get leaders to develop, tell, and retell their personal stories. It also immerses leaders in a process of learning and understanding the political storyline. The personal story and political storyline are developed as leaders interact with each other, as they listen to each other's stories. Stories are also shaped by leaders' participation in social action and planned educational opportunities. Throughout this process PCIC leaders have to negotiate between competing interests and cultural practices. In PCIC, the political storyline is learned by having conversations about a variety of issues and in a variety of settings. It also involved active participation in public meetings, house meetings, and individual interactions. In the process, leaders and organizers developed political strategies, shared stories, told stories of their organizing work, talked about new allies and new relationships, among many other things. It normally involved a combination of learning about the political environment in the nation, state, the county, and the city, issues of immigration, children's rights, employment, housing, among others, reflecting on the organizing work of each participant, collective reflection on readings, and trainings. A vast amount of information was exchanged and then integrated into a political storyline that is then taught to leaders at the local level. This study supports previous empirical work that highlights the importance of socio-economic, cultural, and historical practices, gender, race, class, and by power relations in understanding

transformative learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991; Finger & Asun; 2001; Foley, 1999; Hart, 1990, 2010; Hugo, 2002; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Niewolny & Wilson, 2009; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Schugurensky, 2001).

This study suggests there is a reciprocal relationship between larger community stories or the political storyline and personal stories. The history, the political context, the setting where the story is told, and the people involved in this process are central to what a personal story looks like. If PCIC leaders did not have a community of storytellers, their stories would have never been told. The development of individual stories and learning the political story happen in relationship, in dialogue, through a process of collective learning (Brueggemann, 1978; Chambers, 2003; Coles, 2006; Ganz, 2001; Rappaport; 1995). My research confirms the centrality that accounting for issues of gender, race, class, and the socio-cultural and historical environment has in enhancing a process of individual and social change. Meaning and experience depend on using a lens that includes the factors mentioned above (Clark & Wilson, 1991). As such, a psychological framework for analysis would not be able to provide a nuanced explanation of the learning that takes place inside PCIC.

Just as using a lens for analysis that accounts for gender, race, and class can enhance transformation, a lack of critical reflection about the socio-cultural and historical environment can limit transformative learning processes. Critical reflection in understanding the socio-cultural, historical, and political environment is a fundamental aspect of transformative learning (Brookfield, 2000; Brookfield & Preskill, 2009; Mezirow, 1981). Robert Fisher (1994) suggests changes in the field of community organizing in the United States have historically been tied to structural

forces (the economy, international relations, etc.). He also contends that the field of community organizing ought to look at its history in order to learn from it, but also that history can be used as a framework to study current organizing practices (Fisher, 1994). Within PCIC, this approach would entail historical and cultural analyses of its community organizing traditions. When analyses do occur, they do not serve to question and problematize PCIC's organizing practices, but rather reaffirm what is considered to already work well. PCIC consciously ignores historical accounts which point out community organizing's role in reproducing dominant organizational practices. There is not a concerted effort for a systematic historical analysis, when in fact there is a recursive cycle within community organizing, which moves from more progressive to more conservative approaches to organizing, one that is influenced by larger structural changes (Fisher, 1994). Without this type of analysis, struggles for social justice could easily be co-opted into reproducing this injustice (Coles, 2006; Fisher, 1994), often without even realizing it. It is precisely because of the complex and contested nature of learning inside PCIC that scholars of transformative learning cannot minimize questions of how issues of power, gender, class, race, and the socio-cultural, political and historical environment inform how people experience learning.

**Critical reflection and transformative learning.** Van Woerkom (2010) suggests dominant conceptions of critical reflection “share a common rationalistic bias, implicitly defining critical reflection as a cognitive and rational process” (p. 339). The ideology critique tradition involves people learning to identify how uncritically established and unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices (Brookfield, 2000). Ideology critique emphasizes the “ideal of individual

autonomy in relation to the influence of societal and political systems” (van Woerkom, 2010, p. 343). Ideology critique’s emphasis on rationality and deliberation has been characterized as a Eurocentric male-driven view of learning (Brookfield, 2000). Ideology critique requires deliberation, and the presence of different and even dissenting perspectives (Schugurensky, 2001). This study shows that ideal rational deliberative conditions for critical reflection seldom happened in practice inside PCIC. Transformative learning inside PCIC was triggered by a cathartic emotional and affective process. In what follows, I further illustrate this idea.

PCIC storytelling pedagogy aims at getting leaders to go through cycles of intense emotional and affective learning (Dirkx, 2006, 2011; Horn & Willburn, 2005; Jarvis, 2006; Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Sands & Tennant, 2010). The prescriptive nature of this pedagogical approach encouraged cathartic exchanges among PCIC leaders and organizers, but it was devoid of reflective dialogue that questioned the storytelling pedagogy itself. The development of personal stories got PCIC leaders to look at their histories, identify stories of injustice, which led to a process of emotional turmoil and change. Only then were they able to reflect on their frustration and anger, on the current state of things in society. Only then were they able to enter a process of collectively crafting the political story and uncover inconsistencies and injustice within the dominant story. This critical emotive engagement with storytelling changed people; it did not occur through rational argument. Storytelling evoked cathartic emotional responses in PCIC leaders which eventually led to critical reflection. My investigation of PCIC supports previous empirical work that highlights the role that emotions have in understanding individual

and social transformation (Dirkx, 2006, 2011; Horn & Willburn, 2005; Jarvis, 2006; Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Sands & Tennant, 2010; Taylor, 2008; Yorks & Kasl, 2006).

**Transformative learning and power.** The challenge that scholars face today in the pursuit of radical democracy involves finding a balance between inclusion—respecting individual voices—and at the same time creating the collective will to support a vision for the common good (Barber, 1984; Benhabib, 1996; Boyte, 1996; Fryer, 2010; Young, 1996). The problem is, as Benhabib (1996) and Young (1996) have noted, that Strong Democracy’s pursuit of building a strong community and civic duty based on a common-good ideology has displaced the fundamental rights of individuals. At the same time, the dominant transformative learning paradigm in the United States ignores issues of power in its theory of learning; it ignores the potential that power has for distorting communication (Hart, 1990). This dominant theoretical paradigm does not account for the relationship that power has with dominance (Collard & Law, 1989). PCIC’s prescription for social change is mistakenly predicated on the assumption that relational organizing (storytelling and relationship building) will overcome differential power relations inside the organization. This study supports Hart’s (1990) notion that if we use a power-free model of communication within transformative learning, we fail to see how it can affect processes of critical reflection. I illustrate this further next.

This study uncovered a dynamic inside PCIC where at times the rights of individuals were supported and nurtured, but at the same time undemocratic cultural practices were reproduced. My investigation showed that differential power relations

played a key role in enhancing or limiting people's participation inside PCIC. PCIC teaches people that strong IAF networks require diversity of interests, class, race, and gender. The goal is for people to integrate to PCIC's culture and embrace the organization's identity. Whenever internal conflicts arise, PCIC assumes the relational cultural practices of the organization, democratic deliberation, and negotiation can overcome most problems. PCIC organizes around issues like immigration and living wages, which implicitly challenge race and class structures in society. When it comes to internal problems however, PCIC seeks solutions devoid of gender, race, or class analyses. PCIC's emphasis on deliberation and negotiation ignores issues of privilege based on gender, class, or race. There is an erroneous expectation that PCIC's storytelling pedagogy can break stereotypes and lead to solidarity across gender, race, and class. In essence, PCIC's relational organizing approach frees it from having to address issues of gender, race, and class.

This study challenges the notion that rational deliberative democratic practices alone can explain and provide insight in the quest for a more inclusive and participatory democratic culture inside PCIC. A more useful framework to explain my findings would have to account for how power relations enhance or constrain social action. In this regard my investigation supports Cervero and Wilson's assertion that democratic learning is a social activity which involves people "negotiating interests in relationships of power" (2006, p. 5). In this sense, participation in social action requires that people recognize that "different situations require different forms of negotiation" (Cervero & Wilson, 2006; Forester; 1989). For example, although there is tremendous potential for critical reflection within PCIC's storytelling pedagogy, PCIC

does not question the storytelling pedagogy itself. On the surface, this lack of questioning and dissent appears to be a reasonable and practical way to organize, as organizers often say, “to get things done.” This approach has allowed PCIC to develop a close relationship with powerful business people in Arizona. This has in turn granted organizers and leaders access to power circles and decision-making spheres at the local and state levels. In effect, PCIC organizers encourage assessments that externalize the production of injustice in specific situations, but excuse themselves from any institutional self-critique.

Once the specific target is identified, then the organizing strategy is primarily apolitical pragmatism thereafter. In other words, it focuses solely on people’s interpretation of experience without accounting for how dominant ideologies shape those interpretations. Consequently, reflection inside PCIC is limited to instrumental learning or the how-to of organizing, rather than a critical reflection on the rationale for its organizational practices. In essence, this prescriptive and focused pedagogical approach to reflection inside PCIC ends up quelling dissent.

Reflection on instrumental learning disguises the need for critical reflection in relation to PCIC’s own institutional practices. For instance, the feeling among decision-makers inside PCIC was that there is no time and energy to be wasted with debate and dialogue around process rather than content. There was an unwritten rule inside PCIC that said, “Protect and maintain the organizational culture; we know it works well.” As a result of this underlying cultural pattern, collective critical reflection was not always encouraged. There was little room to address leaders’ questions and concerns even if in rhetoric organizers encouraged this type of dialogue.

Another example that illustrates the importance of understanding power relations involves PCIC's storytelling pedagogy. The process of PCIC leaders developing personal and collective stories (the political storyline) challenged their perceptions of culture, history, power, and their role within personal and collective stories. It also improved leader's critical questioning skills and eventually led them to question, analyze, and challenge power dynamics inside their own institutions (churches, schools, etc.). This process was usually followed by the formation of institutional core teams which ended up challenging institutional hierarchical structures. Hence, storytelling and relational organizing were countercultural and effective ways to challenge internal power structures inside PCIC member organizations. For institutional changes to take place, PCIC leaders had to understand the internal power dynamics of these institutions, build broad support and relationships, and develop careful strategies in order to advocate for building a relational culture inside their organizations as well as supporting PCIC's vision and agenda. PCIC leaders developed keen negotiation and analysis skills as they tried to embed relational organizing within their organizations.

When the same critical questioning approach was used to question the culture of PCIC itself, leaders and organizers were discouraged from disrupting PCIC's organizational culture and practices. For example, decisions inside PCIC followed the following process. Relational meetings led to the identification of issues, which in turn, led to the organization of research actions, followed by the development of an issues agenda. Once the agenda had been developed it was ratified by the membership of the organization at a leaders' assembly. At the assembly, house meetings were held



where people were able to discuss the issues and express either concerns or support for the plan. Although there was an opportunity to challenge the content of the agenda, usually a small group of leaders had negotiated internally before they held the assembly. Decisions had been made before anyone came to the larger meetings. The reality was that a small group of leaders—leaders that brought the most money to the organization, leaders with the largest following, and the leaders with the most formal education—were the ones who determined the direction of the organization, often in a very confrontational manner. When leaders and organizers do question how decisions are made, particularly questions that challenge the organizational culture, they are not taken seriously. Although critical conversations take place in very small and private settings, collective spaces for these conversations are not commonplace inside PCIC. Because decisions are made by a small group of leaders in a pragmatic manner, there is discontent at the local level, but it is seldom voiced in groups, at least when it comes to questioning the process.

My findings support Cervero and Wilson's (2006) conception that deliberative democratic traditions "rest on the rational problem-solving as a key to understanding practical action" (p. 246), but fail to account for "everyday socially structured settings that routinely privilege the interests of some while disadvantaging the interests of others" (p. 241). This study suggests that because of the contested and complex nature of learning inside PCIC, a framework for analysis which includes power is vital in understanding transformative learning in social action.

## **The Dynamics of Learning Inside PCIC**

This study offers empirical insight into the nature of learning in social action. My investigation showed that learning inside PCIC occurs in a complex and contested manner: at times reproducing ways of thinking that supported prevailing organizational practices, and at times it providing spaces for people to recognize, critique, and challenge the existing order (Foley, 1999; Hart, 2010). This study supports Foley's (1999) conception that learning in social action is a contested, and complex social process. This study also reflects Foley's (1999) view that people's participation in social action "reproduces ways of thinking and acting which support the, often oppressive, status quo, but that this same experience also produces recognitions which enable people to critique and challenge the existing order" (p. 3). Leaders experienced learning inside PCIC through a diverse set of practices all happening simultaneously. My investigation found that personal and social transformation would not have happened inside PCIC if all of these learning dimensions had not taken place simultaneously and informed each other. Next I discuss issues around situated learning, the contested nature of learning, and nonformal learning as they relate to the education and learning that takes place inside PCIC.

**Situated learning in action.** The dominant perspective in the field of adult education sees learning as an individual, psychological, and technical process (Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley, 1999; Hugo, 2002; Niewolny & Wilson, 2006, 2009; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Schugurensky, 2003; Wilson & Hayes, 2000). As such, it neglects how power, class, gender, and race influence adult learning (Finger & Asun, 2001; Foley,

1999; Hugo, 2002; Newman, 1994a, 1994b; Schugurensky 2003; Wilson & Hayes 2000; Youngman, 2000). The results of my investigation challenge this humanist understanding of adult learning in that it falls short of explaining how learning occurs in social action. My study supports the results of empirical and theoretical studies that found that accounting for issues of race, class, gender, and the socio-cultural and historical environment plays a vital role in understanding the learning that takes place in social action. Had I studied the learning that takes place inside PCIC from a psychological and decontextualized standpoint, I would have missed the essential recursive nature of learning inside organization, one where meaning in the world is “negotiated and renegotiated” (Wilson, 1993). I would have missed that PCIC has developed pedagogy under the essential premise that leaders learn in a dialectical relationship with the setting. There is intentionality to the collective analysis of personal and collective stories. The findings indicate that stories are strengthened by participating in action, by having relational meetings, and reflecting on the power dynamics in the communities. All this information is reintegrated and informs people’s personal and collective stories. It is then that leaders are able to develop an alternative account of reality, one that allows them to question and challenge the existing order, and thus lead to personal and social transformation. Niewolny and Wilson (2009) suggest that situated learning provides a framework that looks at “issues of learning, context, and power” that can “contribute to social processes of identity formation, knowledge formation, and resistance in adult education” (p. 29). My research supports previous empirical work that suggests that learning in social action is influenced by the nature of each situation, and the idea that learning and

experience are in constant interaction, and are complementary to each other. In the next section discuss the contested nature of the dynamic mentioned above.

**Learning in social action: a contested social activity.** This study was consistent with Foley's (1999) assertion that learning in struggle does not happen in a linear or developmental manner. My findings also concur with Foley's suggestion that adult learning and education are complex and contested social activities where learners experience both instrumental and critical learning. I describe these findings further, in what follows.

My investigation uncovered a paradox between PCIC's espoused pedagogy and its practice. During my two-year investigation PCIC organizers focused on making sure that as many people as possible registered to vote in order to defeat Proposition 200. Mobilizing leaders into action was the central task of organizers and leaders. At the same time, organizers expressed the urgent need for leaders to do relational meetings and to organize house meetings. Organizers were driven by the fast pace of electoral politics and action, while simultaneously trying to focus on the slow and labor intensive process of storytelling and relational organizing. The former had a silencing effect on leaders, while the latter encouraged voice, agency, and contestation. The pedagogy of practicing relational and house meetings and crafting and sharing stories was juxtaposed with the traditional, often assertive and aggressive way organizers conducted trainings and meetings and led the mobilizing efforts to defeat proposition 200. On one hand PCIC leaders learned to challenge, contest, and question personal experience and the socio-economic and political environment, and

on the other hand, they acquiesced to the hierarchical structure inside PCIC. While relational meetings allowed local leaders to gather information about local issues in an inclusive manner and storytelling and relational organizing validated local knowledge, organizers hesitated to give up control. PCIC leaders had to make sense of these contending visions, and had to figure out how to best integrate them into their organizing work. Most of the leaders I interviewed were aware of this dissonance between PCIC's theory and practice, and still valued PCIC's contribution to social change.

This study supports empirical and theoretical studies that found that in PCIC participation in social action reproduces ways of thinking and acting which support dominant organizational practices, but simultaneously occurring learning experiences produced recognitions which enabled them to critique and challenge the existing socio-economic and political order.

**Informal learning in action.** Foley (1999) argues that although some systematic education occurs in some social movement sites and social action, learning in such situations is often informal and incidental; it is tacit (not recognized as learning). Studies of learning in social action contend that the learning that takes place in social action is either incidental (unintended but conscious) or part of the socialization process (unintentional and unconscious learning) (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Lave & Wenger, 1990; Schugurensky, 2003). The findings in this study suggest nonformal learning is vital in deepening the development of leaders inside PCIC. This finding builds on Mündel and Schugurensky's (2008) empirical study of

volunteer organizations which suggests that volunteer organizations would benefit from making learning more explicit; that is, being intentional about fostering “learning by creating appropriate spaces and activities that nurture the development of particular skills, knowledge, and attitudes” (p. 57).

My findings indicate that PCIC leaders gained a much deeper understanding of experience when they participated in planned reflection. Although most of the learning that took place inside PCIC happened incidentally, more formal learning opportunities were vital in deepening the understanding of organizing principles and practices. Furthermore, there was a clear recognition that more formal reflection opportunities would revitalize the organization. Organizers and often leaders carefully planned for meetings, public actions, and training. The trainings and workshops offered to leaders and organizers are vital to their full development as organizers. My research disputes the notion that tacit learning alone will prepare people to engage effectively in social action. My investigation of PCIC contributes to empirical and theoretical research that contends that deeper understanding on experience requires reflection in action, on action, and systematic approaches to critical reflection. It also supports the theoretical and empirical research that contends that there has to be an intentional and systematic set of planned educational experiences in order to deepen the learning of leaders who participate in social action.

## **Practical Implications for Improving PCIC's Pedagogical Approach**

The purpose of this study was to understand the learning that takes place within organizations like PCIC. The findings of this study have contributed significant theoretical and empirical insight into how people experience learning when they participate in social action. My investigation also provided useful insight into the complex, contested dynamic of learning that takes place inside PCIC. My investigation suggests that PCIC has a transformative pedagogical approach that is very effective at developing people's sense of agency and commitment for the common good. This study also found that PCIC pedagogy is grounded on a strong critique of dominant ideology and culture. However, I argue that the true nature and potential of the IAF is revealed in the examination of the ideological space in which paradoxically coexist PCIC's insightful and strong critique of cultural paradigms and its heretofore largely unrecognized reproduction of prevailing organizational leadership practices. The following are some recommendations aimed at supporting PCIC's quest for individual and social transformation.

PCIC's pedagogy fosters trust, it builds hope, it promotes inclusion, and develops a sense collective leadership. At the same time PCIC's lack of transparency when it comes to internal decision-making processes and its top-down, expert-driven, and lecture-style pedagogical approach erodes the trust leaders have in the organization and it can potentially lead to frustration and even leader attrition. This study suggests a need for intentional and systematic individual and group reflection opportunities that explore how dominant ideologies and culture shape the learning and culture of PCIC. These opportunities ought to explore how issues of gender, race, and

class enhance or limit people's participation inside PCIC as well as the type of pedagogical approaches that are used inside the organization. For example, these reflection opportunities ought to look at what factors shape the expert-driven and lecture style approach used by PCIC organizers, and the effect this approach has on leaders. They should to look at how storytellers are chosen inside the organization. They ought to explore the effect that the common aggressive and competitive interactions have on leaders. I explore these issues next.

Given the silencing nature of PCIC's trainings and planned educational opportunities, individual and group reflection strategies ought to look at creating a more inclusive and democratic learning spaces inside the organization. Is it possible for PCIC leaders to be co-creators of knowledge? How can organizers and leaders move from the role of trainer to a facilitator role? How can organizers create opportunities for the most marginalized to voice their perspectives? Do organizers integrate appropriate cultural information in their teaching? What is the role of local/indigenous knowledge in creating relevant learning opportunities? Is education and learning inside PCIC reproducing prevailing conceptions for organizational leadership? An experienced PCIC leader ideally understands the importance of her or his own development and the importance of supporting others in their own development. If PCIC leaders are to be effective facilitators of learning, they ought to pay attention to the issues raised above. In addition, a more inclusive and transparent pedagogical approach would enhance people's sense of self, would build trust, and thus commit them to long-term participation in social action. I suggest this openness would make leaders' commitment to the organization much stronger and better



prepared to support the development of others. It would also make the organization much more dynamic, innovative, and attractive to community members.

### **Future Research**

This study has explored the complex and contested nature of learning in social action by examining education and learning inside PCIC. It has also shown the reciprocal relationship that agency and structure have in explaining the dynamics of learning in community organizing and social action, transformative learning, and strong democratic practices. Future research in the areas of learning in social action, community organizing, transformative learning, and democratic theory should attempt to further clarify the complex, contested nature of learning in IAF like organizations, as well as the dynamic relationship between agency and structure in social action.

This study makes an important empirical contribution to understanding how leaders in IAF-type organizations learn when they participate in social action. Additional research should focus on comparative analyses that look at how people experience learning in other IAF-type organizations. A study that examines learning at multiple IAF- type organizations of analyses would provide a deeper understanding of the dynamic of learning in social action. Future studies of IAF type organizations should particularly look at the effect that the IAF's transformative pedagogy and critique of dominant cultural paradigms has on critical reflection of its own institutional practices.

My investigation supports empirical and theoretical insights to the significant role that reflection on issues of race, class, gender, and socio-economic, cultural, and

political factors plays in transformative learning. Furthermore, this study provided a nuanced explanation of the reciprocal and recursive relationship between agency and structure in social action. Additional research should focus on how issues of power around gender, race, and class inform the learning that takes place in social action. A comparative study of PCIC member organizations with a focus on the above mentioned issues would provide further insight into the role that class, race, and gender play in individual and social transformation. In addition, the findings of this study support studies that suggest that “learning and cognition are culturally constituted through socially structured relations of power” (Niewolny & Wilson, 2009, p. 41). This investigation supports the empirical and theoretical insight that learning in social action is a contested and complex social activity. Future research should continue to explore how intrapersonal, interpersonal, and social factors either challenge or reproduce organizational cultural practices.

This study supports idea that critical reflection is an important aspect of transformative learning, but it does not fully explain the dynamics of transformative learning for social action. Taylor’s (2007, 2008) review of the transformational learning literature highlights the importance of a holistic approach to transformative learning, one that recognizes the affective role/role of emotions. This investigation has also contributed to empirical and theoretical research that considers storytelling and emotions as the catalyst for individual and social transformation (Dirkx, 2011; Horn & Willburn, 2005; Jarvis, 2006; Merriam, Cafarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Solomon, 2007; Yorks & Kasl, 2006), and that they are effective pedagogies for learning in social action. This study suggests further research should focus on the role that

affective learning has in understanding the learning that takes place in social action. There is a need for empirical studies that give additional insight into the nature of critical reflection when people participate in social action.

### **Conclusion: PCIC and the Promise of Strong Democracy**

It has been nineteen years since the first PCIC meeting I attended. As a PCIC leader I was able to uncover many personal stories and acquired the skills to effectively use those stories to engage others in public life. I learned how to organize public actions and campaigns, and how to confront those in power. I became more confident about my ability to speak in public; my self-conception changed. I developed an appetite for learning and supporting the development of other PCIC leaders. It would appear I had learned the necessary skills to effectively participate in civic life (Barber, 1984; Boyte & Kari, 1996; Foley, 1999, Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2003, Stout, 2010; Warren, 2001). It may have seemed back then that PCIC's pedagogical approaches were leading people to individual and social transformation (Barber, 1984, Osterman, 2002; Schugurensky, 2003). PCIC's organizing approach captivated me to a point that I became a true believer and champion of the IAF's organizing style.

Back then I believed PCIC was an organization where, as Barber (1984) suggests, there was strong democratic talk (relational, house meetings, and mentoring), which involved reciprocity and the co-creation of knowledge. We all participated actively, and had very few critical things to say about the IAF. I was able to rise through the ranks of the organization and became part of a small group of leaders and organizers that met once a week to learn about strategy, local politics,

power, and relational and house meetings among others. I remember feeling privileged to be part of this exclusive group of leaders who determined the direction and future of the organization. However, I quickly learned that access to that group required my solidarity and support for the group's decisions. I believed as did many other leaders at the time that PCIC's and the IAF's was the only and best way to prepare people to participate in public life. As leaders commonly joked, "I was a company man." My uncritical views of PCIC at the time kept me from suspecting that PCIC might displace my fundamental rights as an individual, as Benhabib (1996) and Young (1996) would suggest. Although strong democratic talk helped me rise through the ranks of the organization, was this the case with other PCIC leaders? A few years into my work with PCIC, I started wondering why it was that most of the leaders at the top of the organization were either college educated or middle-class. It was unheard of for someone without some degree of formal education to lead the organization. I began asking myself what it would take for someone with low literacy and limited formal education to be part of this group. What would it take for people with limited proficiency in English to make it to that group? Unfortunately, I never felt that I could ask PCIC organizers these questions. There were clear power inequalities inside PCIC, but leaders were either not aware of them or were not willing to talk about them.

While PCIC organizers effectively organize public actions (instrumental learning) such as the one I described at the beginning of this dissertation and do an effective job teaching people to become effective strategic thinkers, the organization does not address people's diminished/negative sense of self, or people's positions of privilege. As Young (1996) suggests, PCIC's relational organizing culture assumes a

neutral and universal culture. PCIC leaders seem to be blind to institutional and historical issues of class, race, and gender because of the organization's emphasis on integration and relationship building. In fact, I was never willing to fully address my own privilege inside the organization until I went back to do my dissertation fieldwork with PCIC. Ironically, PCIC's storytelling pedagogy has the potential to effectively address these issues as I have illustrated previously, but storytelling alone will not account for power differentials inside the organization. As a leader with PCIC I did little to disrupt the cultural practices that privileged my own agenda over the agenda of those with less power inside the organization. In fact, I was taught and encouraged to fight for my own agenda if I ever wanted to get things done.

It is very clear to me now that only when PCIC leaders cease to be treated like instruments of change and become agents of change, will PCIC have truly democratic exchanges and a truly liberating culture inside the organization. While the PCIC's pedagogy has true transformational potential in substance, in practice it has not fulfilled its potential for effecting individual and collective change. PCIC trains leaders to reflect critically on structural socio-economic and cultural factors of injustice, but discourages reflection that looks at how its own cultural practices operate. I suggest the need for a careful study of the agency/structure dynamic, particularly by looking at how internal cultural practices can draw attention to pedagogical practices that enhance people's learning and participation in social action as well as practices that disempower and silence people.

It is vital that PCIC leaders understand the interdependence of the dominant paradigms in society and that leaders and organizers understand how these dominant

paradigms inform their own learning. Only then will community organizing practitioners be able to develop strategies that support a more inclusive, participatory, transformative, and democratic environment. If PCIC and IAF-like organizations hope to rearrange society's economic and social structures they will have to pay attention to how the dominant socio-economic and political paradigms in society affect internal organizing practices and pedagogies. While PCIC's pedagogical approach has true transformational potential in its substance, it disallows critical reflection in relation to its own institutional practices. Unless PCIC has a critical stance on internal exclusionary cultural practices, it will fall short of fostering individual and social transformation.

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